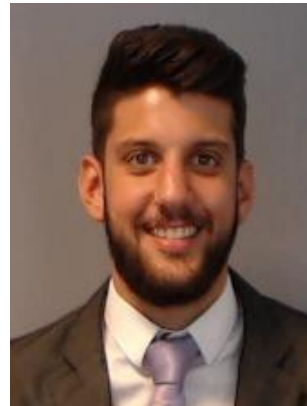




LYCAR Company Project

An exploration on how the Job-Demand-Support-Control theory impacts the leaders' well-being whilst in a virtual environment.

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PRE-CONDITIONS

Grading rubric Lycar Execution: Company Project, Career Portfolio and Final Event		Version April 2021 SPL	
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LYCar Coach:	Dr Brannon	Additional PLO(s):	9
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Preconditions (required for assessment)		Yes	No
Checks content and completeness			
Executive Summary is present, concise, can be read independently, contains information about process and content, focuses on results and outcomes		✓	
LYCar Report is complete and incorporates the following 2 elements: a. LYCar Company Project Report including Design Based Research component and end deliverable(s) for client(s) b. Career portfolio on student's development, reflection and analysis of Intercultural Hospitality Leadership		✓	
LYCar Report meets formal reporting criteria (according to e.g. LYCar Reading & Writing Guide)			
All documents that are part of final assessment are written in English and are professional, including common basic components such as Intro, ToC, Conclusion etc. - see HTH Reading & Writing Guide		✓	
LYCar Company Project Report is max. 12.000 words (counting after Table of Content, incl. text in tables) - visual proof of wordcount is included in Appendices		✓	
LYCar Portfolio is max. 3.000 words (counting after Table of Content, incl. text in tables) - visual proof of wordcount is included in Appendices Career Portfolio		✓	
Harvard Referencing Style is used consistently, referencing to primary sources only. List of References is well presented		✓	
Alignment between all LYCar deliverables can be assessed; all relevant info is included in Appendices			
Assessment & feedback form approved Proposal is included - in Appendices Company Project Report		✓	
Proof of dissemination of the company project is shown: the disseminated piece itself or other relevant material		✓	
Client(s) evaluations are included for all end deliverables incl. a confirmation and evaluation of all deliverables		✓	
Check (technical) formalities and submissions			
LYCar Execution is the last exam at Hotelschool, student has 210 ECs and 150 ECs IFT students (students should have a pass on the LYCar Proposal).		✓	
Turnitin accepted		✓	
LYCar Company Project Report has been sent to larchive@hotelschool.nl		✓	
Ethics and data management			
Ethical, integrity and data management requirements are met (add proof of delivery of data sets to research@hotelschool.nl including research number).		✓	
Entitled to assessment? (All yes above required):		✓	



GLOSSARY

Leader well-being	The positive emotional experiences and an overall sense of purpose of the managers (Robertson and Flint-Taylor, 2008; Fredrickson and Joiner, 2002).
Virtual environment	Working from home, or in distance through technological tools which should allow the individual to be able to work without any fear of isolation, overwork, burnouts and there should still be an opportunity for career progression (Olson, 1983).
JDCS Model	Outlines the impact of adverse job characteristics on health and well-being (Karasek, 1979; Johnson and Hall, 1988).



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The LYCar Execution Report has been conducted in order for the researcher to finalise the last step of the LYCar thesis and help in forming the professional products. The report consists of two chapters, the Research Context and the Client Deliverables.

In the first chapter, the researcher clearly analyses the problem that companies are currently facing due to COVID-19. The situation is increasing the level of stress that employees are facing while working at a more virtual environment and companies cannot ignore it since it has implications on their well-being. Considering the fact that employees are the most important stakeholders of a company, companies should focus on them and constantly invest in opportunities that will enhance their well-being, thus create smooth operation, financial stability and competitive advantage. Nonetheless, maintaining leaders' well-being, such as founders, can be challenging since they have more responsibilities to deal with. Therefore, tools such as the JDCS model can show great potential in understanding the connections between job demands, job control and job support and the impact they have on the leader's well-being while performing in a virtual environment.

All in all, three major conceptions derive from the analysis: JDCS model, leader well-being and virtual environment from which a conceptual framework was created, and the Research Topic was formulated:

How can the JDCS model facilitate leader's well-being within a virtual environment?

In the literature review each key conception has been explained and from there three main propositions derived:

P1: Job demands diminishes leaders' well-being whilst in a virtual environment.

P2: Job control can facilitate leaders' well-being whilst in a virtual environment.

P3: Social support can facilitate leaders' well-being whilst in a virtual environment.



Furthermore, the methodology describes the methods that were used to determine the accuracy of the propositions. For this particular research topic, qualitative research was conducted since it could adopt a holistic approach which preserves the complexities of human behaviour. The population and sample involved eight founders or managers of companies who had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and had to lead their team remotely. For the data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted from where the researcher collected the data, looked for patterns and finally developed a theory, also known as thematic analysis. Lastly, the researcher took into consideration any possible ethicalities and limitations when conducting the interviews to create a safe and trustful environment.

From the findings it was concluded that even though long working hours, being highly autonomous and taking decisions can boost the energy and motivation of a person, founding a startup and having employees looking up on their leaders can generate high expectations which can negatively impact the well-being. Also, providing the correct skills to a team while working virtually could be rather challenging for the well-being, considering that the employees need to be taught and engaged in a correct way. Interestingly, it was suggested that entrepreneurship can be looked at different approaches to eliminate any stereotypes revolving around a successful entrepreneur.

The final chapter describes that in order for the entrepreneurship to be looked at a different viewpoint, a booster session by means of a PowerPoint presentation has been prepared which includes the various methods towards enhancing a leader's well-being and a redefined leadership. The deliverable was composed with the help of theories and models which it was later shared with the client for constructive feedback.



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RESEARCH CONTEXT

Introduction

This chapter includes the framework of the proposed research, provides insights into the current working environment and the importance of leaders' well-being, the urgency and the reason for conducting this research and finally the research goal. Based on these insights a Research Topic has been formulated and based on the Research Topic a literature review has been conducted, leading to propositions.

Above 50 percent of the global employees is working remotely and as the pandemic continues to impact health, we are facing a possible extension of the remote work. Research explores that most employees appreciate flexibility, especially those who are forced to travel long distances to get to work. On the other hand, continuous remote work extends the workday, disrupts work-life balance and reduces well-being (Das, 2020). Undoubtedly, employees are considered one of the most important stakeholders in companies (Fern, 2021). Most successful companies are constantly investing and focusing on their employees because they genuinely believe they can have an impact on their performance. Sir Richard Branson (1996) who is considered a pioneer for his excessive employee centricity, has stated 25 years ago that "Clients do not come first, but employees. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients".

Firstly, it would be wise to define well-being at workplace. Workplace well-being is defined from positive psychology researchers as the positive emotional experiences and an overall sense of purpose (Robertson and Flint-Taylor, 2008; Fredrickson and Joiner, 2002). Moreover, well-being is covering a holistic view with the World Health organisation stating that "well-being is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1946). The urgency of this topic aligns with the current pandemic that has impacted all three aforementioned factors which comprise the well-being. Employees respond differently during times of crisis especially when change occurs with reactions such as discomfort, fear, anger, frustration, and even full resistance which leads to implications of their well-being (Smollan, Matheny and Sayers, 2010).



Consequently, the employees' well-being is of utmost importance as it is directly associated with their performance and productivity which then reflects immediately on the smooth operation and financial stability of companies (Haddon, 2018). The importance of a leader on the development, support and performance of the employees is unparalleled. For that reason, this research focuses on the leader's well-being because a satisfied leader can successfully manage and develop the rest of the team. Additionally, studies have shown that leader's well-being diminishes the risk of burnout and flawed decision making (Bernerth and Hirschfeld, 2016; Moss, 2020).

An increasing number of companies are nowadays transitioning, embracing the "virtual-first" environment which has four characteristics. The first one is the choice of employees getting in the office or willingly staying home. The second one is that managers are capable to handle all their tasks like coaching and evaluating productivity, remotely. Thirdly, the technology is the greatest tool in this instance because it allows working in different setups and environments and everyone has access on any data they need. Lastly, the company culture is promoting trust and belongingness. The interpersonal bonds are formed with care (BBC, 2020).

The virtual environment and remote working setup have been established in some domains and certain industries for a few years already. Unfortunately, nowadays, due to the circumstances and the impact of Covid-19, the virtual environment has become an everyday working experience for most employees. However, working in a virtual environment brings many more responsibilities which can impact greatly the leader's well-being. The need of constant communication, keeping the motivation high, having an overview of all the employees' tasks can create a stressful situation were companies need to act fast (Olson, 1983). Research investigates that a model such as the Job Demand-Control-Support (JD-CS) is a great tool to better understand the connections between job demands, job control and job support and the impact they have on the leader's well-being while performing in a virtual environment. Thus, the goal of the client is to understand the importance of the well-being during times of crisis and be able to create opportunities in order to enhance it.

It is important to stress that although leadership research has focused on artificial threats like crime and civil unrest, very little studies have been conducted about leadership challenges comprising from other types of threat like covid-19 for instance (Bader, Stoermer, Bader and Schuster, 2018). Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore the validation of the JDCS model, and more specifically have a look at how it can facilitate leader's well-being through a virtual environment. Hence, the goal of the researcher is to gain insight on the behaviour of leaders within a virtual environment and more specifically, explore effective ways that the JDCS model can enhance their well-being.

Comprehensively, three major conceptions derive from the above mentioned: JDCS model, leader well-being and virtual environment. As a result, a conceptual framework has been summoned clarifying the dependency between leader's well-being and virtual environment with the JDCS model being the moderator of the two variables (Fig.1). Lastly, it is worth mentioning that all the knowledge gain and understanding of the topic aligns well with the SDG 3 (dealing with good health and well-being) and 8 (decent work and economic growth) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) established by the United Nations, which can contribute to facilitating organisations creating better workplaces.

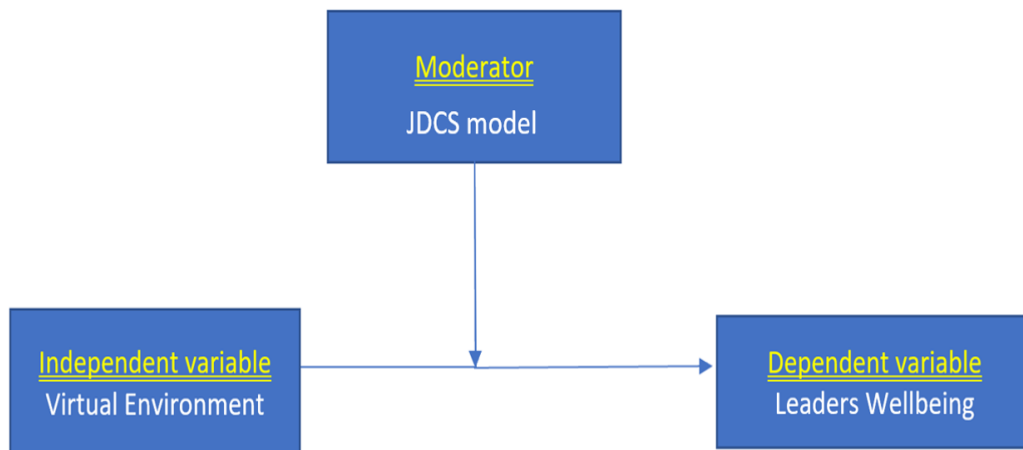


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of JDCS model which can facilitate leader's well-being within a virtual environment.



Literature review

To get a more profound comprehension of the elements that are important for the Research Topic, a literature review has been constructed. The elements are firmly explored by utilizing secondary data from specialists in numerous fields. Relying on the findings of the literature review, propositions have been formulated that will help develop the framework based on the research that has been performed.

Well-being at workplace

Well-being at workplace is a rather ambiguous and subjective term. According to Waddell and Burton, (2007) well-being is a multi-element state that considers physical, material, social, emotional, developmental and activity dimensions. Warr, (1990) suggests that well-being tends to be a broader concept that takes into consideration the “whole person”. Furthermore, researcher Fisher (2014) describes well-being at work through a framework including elements such as job satisfaction, social well-being and positive as well as negative affect at work.

Research investigates that there are 4 major points which highlight the importance of effectively addressing well-being at workplace (Seymour, Sweeney, Fleischmann, Ross and Grove, 2011; Hassan et al. 2009). Firstly, work is beneficial and has an impact on society because employees are generally happier and healthier. Thus, the workforce is contributing to the society by assisting the public purse in taxes providing help to those that are unemployed. Another major point is that health and well-being offer the business a great leverage due to the increased productivity and quality of service provided resulting in higher revenues. Additionally, it is proven that well-being decreases absenteeism. Lastly, the fourth point is that workplace well-being interventions proved to be effective when battling with depression or anxiety.



The British mental health centre (2009) found out that employees with mental health issues which are present at workplace, cost the UK economy much more than employees being absent. More specifically unhealthy presenteeism costs 15.1 billion while absenteeism costs 8.4 billion. A similar research in the US found out that disengaged employees cost 350 billion dollars every year (Osborne and Hammoud, 2017). That depicts the magnitude of the well-being at workplace.

The current pandemic is proven to be an extreme test for global leadership. While some leaders have flourished, others are struggling to manage this crisis phenomenal extents. Organizational leaders are relying on their instincts and insights, provided by HR professionals, to guarantee the support of their organization and employees (Dirani et al, 2020). Crisis communication as a crucial part of the crisis management, refers to candid and frequent communications with employees about the current state of the business. Hearing regularly from team leaders, taking perspective, and ensuring the well-being of those impacted by the pandemic, is one of the core responsibilities of the leaders at the time of a pandemic and business lock down (Dirani et al, 2020).

Well-being for leaders

Amidst crisis, organizations are probably encountering significant disturbances. Leader's most important focus would be to resume, recover the business, and start operating in crisis management mode. Therefore, employees may be at most risk in many ways. They may experience traumatic situations, they should figure how to deal with complexity, how to adjust to the new way of working, and they will require emotional and psychological support. This is essential for business leaders such as managers to become more flexible since employees are, also, unprepared and need to adjust to the new situation. Consequently, leaders are found in situations which they need to support both the organisation that is struggling as well as their subordinates and at the same time maintain their own well-being.



The psychological empowerment, positive reinforcement and appreciation for work, and communication are essential for leaders during times of crisis, especially since employee's needs are an important aspect to focus on in response to COVID-19. HRD professionals should play a major role to address leaders' needs (Gilbreath and Montesino, 2006). Gilbreath and Montesino, (2006) mentioned that HRD professionals need to distinguish the workplace stressors and offer solutions to improve employee well-being. When a crisis occurs, employees will depend on organizations for guidance and organizations will depend on employees to push forward and meet people's high expectations.

Research on crisis leadership states, "crisis leadership demands an integration of skills, abilities, and traits that allow a leader to plan for, respond to, and learn from crisis events while under public scrutiny" (Wooten and James, 2008). HRD experts have the obligation to support leaders by setting them up to deal with current and future crises (Wooten and James, 2008). Additionally, HRD specialists have to support organizational leaders to spread a positive brand image of the organization by inspiring empathy, innovativeness, and thoughtfulness. Through a strategic and proactive approach, HRD can help build individual and organizational resilience during a crisis (Dirani et al., 2020).

Virtual environment and leadership

The virtual work environment is one of the many situations forever changed by the technology development. Olson (1983) defined virtual environment as working from home, or in distance through technological tools which should allow the individual to be able to work without any fear of isolation, overwork, burnouts and there should still be an opportunity for career progression. According to Purvanova and Bono(2009), a virtual setup is creating positive reactions in the beginning due to the new arrangement, but that can quickly fade since employees are soon feeling isolated. Therefore, leaders should be able to convey encouragement and enthusiasm via the written word without supportive nonverbal signals (Purvanova and Bono, 2009).



Normally, charismatic leaders have built their trust through face to-face interaction. However, employees working from distance tend to believe that no news is bad news, and consequently, the lack of interaction erodes trust (Salter, Green, Duncan, Berre and Torti, 2010). Therefore, it is explored that trust in a virtual environment can be achieved through an open culture that shares information, cultivates teamwork, and promotes positive commitment to an organization's goal (Salter, Green, Duncan, Berre and Torti, 2010). This is the time for authentic leaders to help systems and individuals overcome limitations and fears and boost their performance.

Researcher Cascio (2000) explores the importance of having a multifunctional team of senior managers in collaboration with HR who can always promote and support the virtual environment. There are some vital characteristics which virtual leaders need to possess to be successful. They should communicate with honesty and transparency; staying calm and leading by example; helping employees stay safe and healthy; checking in and caring; and being clear and direct (Dirani et al, 2020).

The well-being of every individual is the priority of every organisation. Most importantly, managers and supervisors who are responsible preparing the environment for their employees, must be motivated, enthusiastic and knowledgeable about key issues that arise while working remotely (Cascio, 2000). Broad support alone is not enough to guarantee an increased well-being, thus a successful virtual workplace. Consequently, these new business realities coupled with high demands, suggest that virtual environment working can be challenging for many leaders, hence have implications on their well-being (Cascio, 2000). Research further examines that newer information seeks for greater authority, autonomy and responsibility. Therefore, a greater pressure will be on the leaders and their stress level can easily increase. As a result, research suggests that continual training in both new tools and new processes on how to better operate in a virtual environment, is beneficial for managers and supervisors (Cascio, 2000).



JDCS model

Researchers (Del Pozo-Antúnez, Ariza-Montes, Fernández-Navarro and Molina-Sánchez, 2018) investigate that workplace health management is crucial for improvements in psychosocial working conditions and health. Encouraging healthy work environments is a matter of ethics as well as business competitive advantage, since the most competitive and successful companies are those with mentally and physically healthy workers due to policies supporting and protecting their health (Del Pozo-Antúnez, Ariza-Montes, Fernández-Navarro and Molina-Sánchez, 2018). There is no doubt that work is part of the social dimension of health. Companies recognize the importance of the well-being of their employees, their families and communities through a series of factors linked to the employment relationship, such as wages, hours of work, workload and stress levels, interactions with co-workers, access to paid leave and health-promoting workplaces (Del Pozo-Antúnez, Ariza-Montes, Fernández-Navarro and Molina-Sánchez, 2018).

In 1979, Robert Karasek introduced the job demand-control model (JDC) only to be upgraded 10 years later from Johnson and Hall including the element of support. The model outlines the impact of adverse job characteristics on health and well-being (Karasek, 1979; Johnson and Hall, 1988). Fundamentally, the model comprises of the theoretical methodologies used to analyse the connection between the attributes of labour and workplace well-being. The model is composed from three main elements namely job demands, job decision latitude and job social support (Karasek, 1979; Johnson and Hall, 1988). According to the author, job demand and job control are the most essential job characteristics influencing well-being. The social support was integrated afterwards into the model as another essential characteristic. The JDCS model predicts work situations, characterized by high demands, low control, and low social support, to be most harmful for workers' well-being (Del Pozo-Antúnez, Ariza-Montes, Fernández-Navarro and Molina-Sánchez, 2018). In general, the model states that job demands cause a strain unless the degree of control that the employee has on their work and the social support available, have a higher influence (Fig. 2).

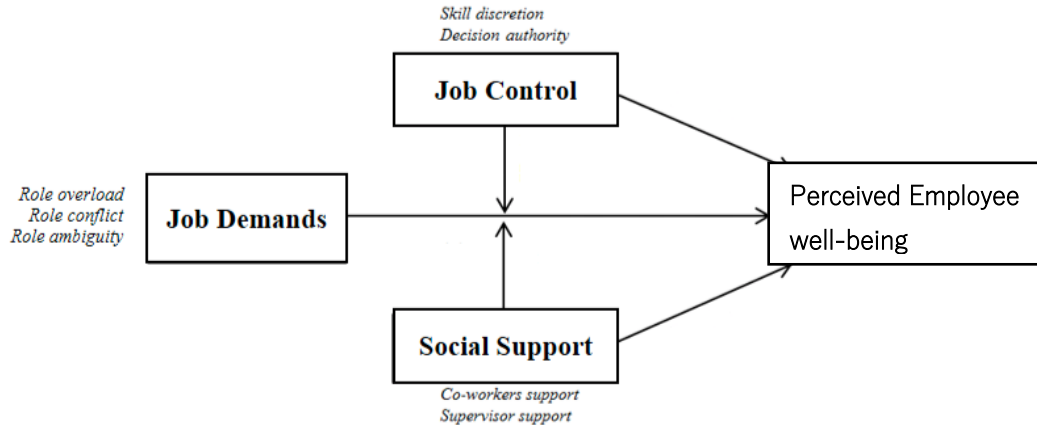


Figure 2: The effect of Job Demand-Control-Support (JD-CS) model on employee's well-being (Karasek, 1979; Johnson and Hall, 1988).

Negative consequences of work are set into relation to the two dimensions, job demand and job control. Job demands are those physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job, typically operationalized in terms of quantitative aspects such as workload, time pressure, long work hours, expectations, and/or interpersonal conflict with others in the work environment that lead to unfavourable health outcomes (Wood, Daniels and Ogbonnaya, 2020). As a result, they can reduce health and energy causing severe mental disorders over a period of time and eventually, low employee performance (Adil and Baig, 2018). Consequently, employees start to invest more time to accomplish higher job demands without thinking how this would impact their work-life balance. Research explores that job demands have a positive impact on employee burnout as well as time pressures (Adil and Baig, 2018). Therefore, employees tend to suffer if they remain unsuccessful in effectively and efficiently managing their workload within the stipulated time (Wood, Daniels and Ogbonnaya, 2020).

Respectively, the organisation would initially face low engagement and commitment from employees and later, a high intention to leave the organisation. Furthermore, research examines the importance of job control and supportive management as core resources in regulating the job demands, thus facilitate the well-being and increase the motivation of employees (Wood, Daniels and Ogbonnaya, 2020).



Individuals who partake in high-status and professional work are often highly committed to their careers and as a result often experience job demands such as excessive work-life conflict, heavy workloads and long work hours with little rest that are consequently detrimental to their well-being. Consequently, a leader's job can be extremely demanding in a variety of ways and there is no doubt that many leaders find the work stressful (Lynne, 2019).

P1: Job demands diminishes leader's well-being whilst in a virtual environment.

The second job characteristic, job control (also termed decision latitude), refers to the extent to which a person can control their tasks and general work activity. Having 'control' in the workplace is considered important since it can simultaneously benefit workers' health directly and help reduce the detrimental effects of psychological, physical and emotional job demands on well-being (Lynne, 2019). Researchers (Häusser, Mojzisch, Niesel and Schulz-Hardt, 2010), explore that there are two major aspects of job control, namely skill discretion and decision authority. Skill discretion refers to a person's opportunity to use specific job skills in the working process. In contrast, decision authority refers to the extent to which a person is autonomous in task-related decisions, such as timing and method control (Häusser, et al, 2010).

Employees with greater autonomy experience better health outcomes than workers without these forms of control where the former report less frustration and anxiety, lower rates of burnout, reduced physical symptoms, etc. It is anticipated that those in high-status and professional careers (e.g., managers, supervisors, business executives, etc.) might obtain these favourable health benefits of job control more than lower status workers because members of these professions traditionally uphold greater autonomy and discretion in their careers and work environments (Tooren and de Jong, 2014).



However, the study supports that greater authority is not necessarily desirable for workers who are ultimately overrun with numerous responsibilities, increased workplace conflict and work-life difficulties. Having authority is not related to a more favourable well-being. In fact, employees might experience negative health outcomes considering that their role has increased demands (Tooren and de Jong, 2014). Consequently, research investigates how job control in the form of authority can act as more of a burden than an advantage (Del Pozo-Antúnez et al, 2018).

P2: Job control can facilitate leader's well-being whilst in a virtual environment.

The third component of the JDCS model, namely social support, argues that social support at the workplace, from supervisors and colleagues, could assist employees in dealing with high demands, thus lowering work strain and stress (Böckerman, Bryson, Kauhanen and Kangasniemi, 2017). Supporting the well-being of employees is an important aspect of management in any organization since it contributes greatly to the employee morale and can increase the organisation's retention rates (Mckinley, 2020). Furthermore, research investigates that quality relations between organisations and their professionals develop more intensely when the employees feel supported by the organization, which can lead to a decrease of stress, reduced burnout, etc. hence, no intentions in leaving the organization (Fila, 2016).

The full impact of the coronavirus has been the first port of call for many employees seeking answers (Daniels and Guppy, 1994). Moving rapidly into a virtual environment and changing the way most well-established teams used to work, have most employees no doubt turned to their line managers or supervisors for support first (Li, Schaubroeck, Xie and Keller, 2018). In turn, these leaders are dealing with an invasion of changes and challenges to the way they manage and support their teams. Consequently, this has an impact on leader's well-being which urge on their need for support in order to know how to help their employees in complex situations (Li et. al, 2018).



Researchers Böckerman, Bryson, Kauhanen and Kangasniemi (2017) identify three variables by which social support may diminish the adverse effects of job demands, namely role clarity, collective leadership and, motivational support (Böckerman et. al, 2017). Role clarity is defined as “the degree to which individuals feel they have clear guidance about expected roles and behaviours associated with their job.” (Lang, Thomas, Bliese and Adler, 2007). Research explores that role clarity may be helpful for leaders who experience high job demands, because the clearer the tasks and responsibilities, the clearer their expectations.

“Collectivism exerts a positive influence on the level of well-being of professionals, which is measured by three components, namely job satisfaction, work-life balance and life satisfaction” (Del Pozo-Antúnez, et. al, 2018). In their book “Leadership in the Age of Complexity,” Margaret Wheatley and Debbie Frieze (2010) discuss a shift from thinking of a leader as a “hero” to thinking of a leader as a “host”. When a leader is the “hero,” it is expected from them to have all the answers, solve all the problems, and fix everything for everyone else. The “hero” needs to be dynamic, charismatic, and brilliant. However, this comes to the cost of the leader’s well-being considering that they are putting too much effort (Wheatley and Frieze, 2010). Also, a “hero” leader often chooses to make quick decisions and use quick solutions which are not well suited for the complex issues that companies face today.

Instead, leaders are needed as “hosts”: those who have the skills to promote shared learning, effective group decision making, reflection, visioning and goal setting, and mutual accountability (Wheatley and Frieze, 2010). A great benefit of collective leadership is that the responsibility can be shared. Instead of turning to your leader for answers, where the pressure can be exhausting and they often feel burdened, the responsibility can be shared where leaders can feel like they are surrounded by resourceful people (Contractor, DeChurch, Carson, Carter and Keegan, 2012). The employees then are hungry for more responsibility and when that is shared, the work is easier and more fun for everyone involved (Contractor et al. 2012).



Research further investigates that stress has become one of the most serious health issues, considering the today's crisis where employers, individuals and governments have assessed the financial damage (Lu, 1999). Maslow's hierarchy model appears to be an important theory for the motivation of employees, even during a crisis. From the model there are five basic needs to be identified which are related to each other (Leavitt, Pondy and Boje, 1989). "When a need is reasonably well satisfied, the next 'higher' need emerges." (Kappen, 2010). Considering that things are changing rapidly due to COVID-19 and the new flow added to that, things are becoming more uncertain. Consequently, that raises a lot of questions for both employees and leaders. Hence, leaders need to assess first where they stand within the hierarchy and make sure that they are in their right head and heart space before they address their employee's needs (Greiner, 2020).

P3: Social support can facilitate leader's well-being whilst in a virtual environment.

To conclude, after the analysis of the research topic and the execution of the literature review, the new conceptual framework has been formulated (Fig 3). From the findings of the literature review some potential deliverables have been drafted. The proposed future potential deliverables could be the concept of collectivism meaning, frequent line-ups for the dissemination of tasks that were normally dedicated for the manager, to the rest of the team. Clear communication needs to be established in order to avoid surprises among employees. Another potential deliverable could be the active role of the HR department in the support of the leaders. An example would be the clarity in job description roles so the person that would be interested in a managerial position for any organisation would be familiar with all tasks and responsibilities that they will be responsible for. Job clarity is decreasing the stress which automatically increases the well-being.

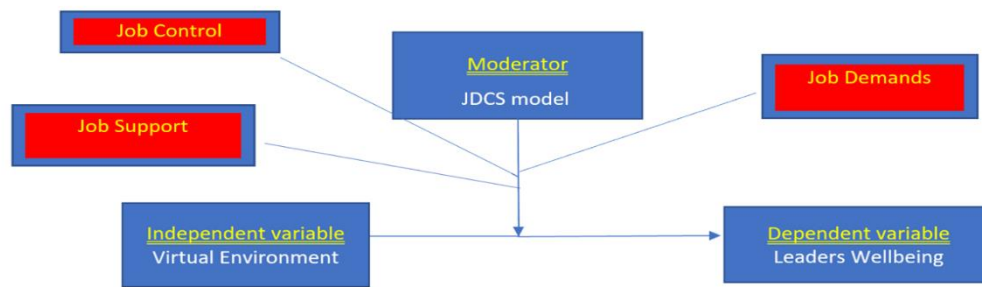


Figure 3: Updated conceptual framework with the three variables of the JDCS model included.



Methodology

Following the problem definition, the analysis and diagnosis and the formulation of a research topic, this chapter defines the ways which were used to execute the research- the solution design. Moreover, it describes the logic behind why certain methods were used and the framework that was followed to achieve a valid, reliable and coherent study.

Research method

The research was executed through an exploratory approach and entailed a philosophical stance. That is because, the connection between the virtual environment, the JDCS model and the well-being of leaders has been minimally researched to date. Hence, it was decided to collect qualitative data for the execution of this research. “Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live” (Myers, 1997). Qualitative research is looking to answer the "what" question and adopts a holistic approach which preserves the complexities of human behaviour (Black, 1994).

A number of sources argue that conducting qualitative research on leadership demonstrates a lot of benefits (Conger, 1998; Bryman, Bresnen, Beardsworth and Keil, 1988; Alvesson, 1996)). Increased chances of developing empirically supported new ideas and theories, more relevant and interesting information for practitioners, and finally thorough explorations of leadership phenomena are some of those benefits of qualitative research on leadership. Furthermore, given that there was a time frame to conduct the research and the participants were being investigated at the same time the study was cross-sectional (Setia, 2016). Additionally, an inductive approach was followed for the execution of the study since little research was conducted on the proposed topic. The researcher collected the data, looked for patterns and finally developed a theory (research-methodology, 2020).



For the execution of this research, the population involved managers of Venture capital companies and founders of startups such as Antler, who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and had to lead their team remotely, in a virtual environment. In research terminology, population can be defined as a group of people or objects that own similar characteristics regarding the sampling criteria which have been predefined by the researcher (umsl, 2021).

More specifically, the focus of the research is on entrepreneurs founding startups in The Netherlands. Eight semi-structured interviews have been executed with open-ended questions, with entrepreneurs that are performing in a virtual environment. The questions were addressed to understand the phenomena between the virtual environment, the JDCS theory and the leadership well-being. Moreover, through those interviews the propositions that were addressed in Literature Review were answered.

Mediated method was utilized for the execution of the conducted interviews. This method is defined as a way to utilize technological media such as a telephone, computer, or other hand-held devices (Jenner and Myers, 2019). For the current study all interviews were executed using synchronous methods such as webcam.

Data analysis

After every interview was finished it was immediately transcribed. Significant weight has been given on keeping the main points of interviewees without changing the meaning of what has being said.

For the analysis of the interviews, the researcher used thematic analysis through colour-coding. Thematic analysis is scientifically classifying and understanding the patterns of topics from a data set (Nowell, Norris, White and Moules, 2017). Firstly, the patterns of the data set were identified, found and categorised from the interviews and then sub-categories were created. Subsequently, all the matching answers were gathered and ordered on a table with the identical colour-category to extract the findings. Since the inductive approach was used, the possibility for new categories to come up has been possible. Indeed, new categories arose and they were added to the list.



When conducting the interviews, the researcher ensured that the participants fully agreed on using their answers to draw conclusions. The participants were allowed to withdraw from the procedure of participating in the research whenever they felt like. Additionally, they were asked if they felt comfortable being recorded. To further secure the interviews, the researcher promised confidentiality whilst analysing and sharing data.

The researcher had a hard time to secure the interviews with the prospective participants. Due to excessive workload the requested prospects either refused politely to participate, stopped responding to messages or did not respond at all. In fear of scaring the interviewees who have already accepted, the researcher avoided to provide them with the consent form provided by Hotelschool. Instead, the researcher began every interview with a verbal consent from the interviewees that they agreed to have the session recorded and that the data would be used for research purposes only and would be handled discreetly.



Findings

As mentioned previously in the data analysis section, a thematic analysis has been utilized to deduct the findings. The three propositions have been analysed, however not all of them had the same impact. Additionally, new subthemes were introduced from the interviewees that have been documented but not interpreted nor drawn conclusions out of them. The interview transcriptions were placed in the appendices, but the most important quotes were documented in the following section to underpin the propositions.

P1: Job demands diminish leader's well-being whilst in a virtual environment.

A very frequent argument during the interviews regarding Job demand is that the workload and long working hours is part of the joy. Specifically, interviewee 4 stated “I call myself a workaholic. So, I'm a person that usually wakes up at 5:40 and starts working half an hour after. And sometimes I had days that I was working until two or 3:00 AM in the next morning. But I enjoy it. That's something I like, and that's why I'm doing it.” Another entrepreneur said “The job itself it is demanding, but it always is when it's the beginning. Especially in startups. If you want to build up something and make it successful, there is a lot of pain, a lot of long hours, that they go into it. You can't just have that nine to five mentality”.

Two other interviewees said “I can do this 24/7. That is not an issue” and “Most days it's fun. I think I'd be quite bored if.... So, I have long hours, but at the same time I have flexibility in how I'm working and when, so that's okay”. Finally, interviewee 6 mentioned the following “I definitely prefer more the ups. Let's say when there's a lot of classes in their program, and there's a lot of things happening. Because, yeah, the new experiences, new people, I get energy out of that because I am extrovert and I also think it's healthy. Of course, not to have 100% pressure every month because we would all go crazy”.



Another important subtheme seems to be Work-life balance. Interviewees mentioned frequently how important it is to set boundaries between work and social activities. More specifically, interviewee 1 stated that “Now I spend a little bit more time with myself than Work, work, work and that become more productive. I'm going to spend literally eight hours working on my startup. And then the rest of the time, I need to take care of myself. Because you're not productive, because spend 20 hours do the same thing. Right? So rather, spend less and do more.” Moreover Interviewee 6 mentioned “We love having the flexibility, you know, especially somebody needs to go to a dentist, then it's around the corner from your house, you don't need to commute to an office, etc”.

Additionally, Interviewee 6 and 8 stressed the importance of physical needs. Particularly, Interviewee 6 mentioned the following “I think it's also listening to my needs, the needs of my body and listening also to the needs of my people.” and Interviewee 8 indicated that “I sleep 8 hours a day. And that's non-negotiable. Whatever else I have to do, I cut from whatever else I have to do, rather cutting the sleep. And the reason for that is because in a startup, you face challenges every week. And if you're not well rested, and if you're not healthy, you cannot deal with those things”. On the other hand, there is the argument of the Interviewee 4 who said that his employees don't leave the office (they are going to the office once or twice a week). Specifically, he mentioned “they usually don't leave at 17:30 that they have to, even if they are done with their job, they just stay there until seven or eight, sometimes till nine, they gather together there, they play games, they talk to each other. I make them some cocktails myself, and we sit there and drink and laugh”.

From the interviews another subtheme namely the Expectations subtheme arose frequently and had a number of relevant responses about it. The interviewees shared how much high expectations they have especially due to the position most of them are in. The fact that they are founding a startup reflects directly on their tasks and consequently expectations. It is worth mentioning that most interviewees have also shared that they regard consider their job as a high job demand. More specifically Interviewee 2 said “the current position I'm in it's totally dependent on me and my co-founder right. So, I cannot rest. I cannot think, I cannot really turn off because I know if I do then, everything that we've built so far is gonna



go crumbling down”. Interviewee 6 said “I think maybe the leaders have a little bit more on their shoulders as a responsibility to generate that well-being for their teams. And at the same time, you have the responsibility of leading that by example by, taking the well-being on your own shoulders, because if you're a horrible manager...”. Interviewee 4 but also others (1&8) stressed the importance of the employees looking up to their leader. Interviewee 4 mentioned “I'm of the idea that they have to have someone to look up to. So, if they see you stressed or out of control, I believe that will lose your credibility.”. Another point of view regarding expectations has been brought in the scene and that was the competition which is increasing the expectations for everyone in the company to overcome their competitors.

P2: Job control can facilitate leader's well-being whilst in a virtual environment.

“I have the autonomy as the co-founder, to put all the barriers and to put certain limits. Especially, you know, to be able to say, I'm not going to be working beyond 7pm.” This was one of the interviewees mentioned directly linking the autonomy at workplace with well-being. Another Interviewee mentioned “To me, autonomy is not so much about who's the ultimate decision maker. We're not very hierarchical. So very often it's going to be a discussion. It's not anyone's idea that wins, but we kind of build onto each other's ideas. And yeah, I think I have pretty high degree of autonomy. To me it's more about being able to chip in and have your ideas heard” Another interviewee said “I feel very autonomous in decision making in Antler. I feel that we have a culture in which it is very much appreciated, where you take decisions and also take initiatives and I have not ever experienced being sort of negatively harassed because of taking a decision or taking an initiative”.

Another topic that came forward during the interviews was the skill discretion subtheme. Regarding fulfilling their tasks within the virtual environment Interviewee 1 mentioned “I think it just improved my leadership skills in a way. Because, I mean, when you're talking to someone on video, versus on an email, or in a boardroom setting, there are so many things to think about, right? You need to think about, like how you dress. So, for example, go to P capital, they all dressed up in their fancy suits and some cool cologne. But in COVID, I could just put on a T shirt and pants, I wouldn't be very conscious of myself, I



just focus on the content.” Interviewee 6 highlighted the importance of handling the employees in the virtual environment to avoid them being overwhelmed. More specifically he said “you need to be more careful in the way you're energising people or in the way you're engaging them. Because simply, it's harder to do online than doing it face to face.” Lastly, the founder of another company mentioned that the organisational structure of the company is formed in a way which pushes the employees to evolve and develop their skills through the authority he is providing them.

Speaking of authority, the decision authority is perceived as another major subtheme in Job Control. In general, it becomes clear from the responses that most of the times when there are co-founders in a startup there is this mutual decision making. With regards to the virtual environment the interviewees had different opinions whether it is a threshold for decision making or not. In particular Interviewee 2 said “I try to make my decisions based on data. So, I don't think the decision-making is affected by the virtual environment” and Interviewee 8 mentioned the following: “I actually think decisions can be made much quicker. So, for decision to happen, you need input? It's much easier now to gather the input you need by meeting with people than if you had to meet with them face to face”.

On the other hand, there is the following belief from another founder, Interviewee 6 who mentioned “I need some advice from the accountant and the accountant is giving me an appointment for in a week on zoom, not picking up the phone. So, everybody's just overloaded and has a zoom fatigue. And it just takes forever, then for me that I need to go on Google and whatever, something that the accountant can tell me on the phone in five minutes. So that I can delay a decision.” Additionally, Interviewee 7 mentioned “just being available online is very important, I always tried to be very responsive, communicative, having the right communication systems in place as an employer is super important to keep that communication going and then to allow for people to take decisions quickly”.



P3: Social support can facilitate leader's well-being whilst in a virtual environment.

With regards to the Job support theme 4 subthemes arose during the interviews namely role clarity, collective leadership, motivational support and ethical entrepreneurship. In respect to collective leadership, all of the interviewees had a positive input to add about working with the rest of the team to provide the best outcome. Some interviewees also supported that collective leadership directly resonates to the leader. Particularly, interviewee 2 said “we actually want to create a workspace where everybody loves what they're doing. And that energy feeds the leader as well”.

Another point of view which really reflects on collective leadership was the following from interviewee 6: “you actually get more done when we are together, at least that's how we experienced it”. Finally, empathy has played an important role within collective leadership. More specifically Interviewee 1 mentioned “So I always say, build empathy, and really try to connect with people that you're working with, not just on, like, on a very functional level. So, this is what we do. This is your role.”. Interviewee 5 added “the more empathetic you are the more the support systems and your end leaders can function better with their employees and vice versa, like how considerate you are in everything”.

Another main subtheme of Job Support was the motivational support. Especially in these difficult times where apart from the daily difficulties that are present in the workspace, leaders had to deal with the complexities caused from the pandemic, motivational support seemed to be a vital tool to improve the situation. Interviewee 1 boldly stressed the situation of the pandemic: “I would say you need to find out how to manage you know those thoughts, because that's a very difficult thing to do, especially during the pandemic, where one minute you're like, "Yeah, we're about to do it" next day, things are closed. Right, so having a very realistic, optimistic mindset is one of the things that I'm always saying people should cultivate”. Others see the importance of feedback as a motivating support tool. More specifically Interviewee 2 mentioned “So if you're receiving this emotional support from the family is very rewarding.



But another important thing is feedback from customers, investors, and business partners” and Interviewee 6 said “we always have kind of the feedback session of the weeks or Mondays we talk about what we liked from the week before what could have been done better, etc. And you always see that for all the team members, the highlight of the week is that day when we have been working together, and typically is the time of the week where you get also most done” and lastly Interviewee 8 mentioned “So a really important one for me is mentors and advisors. I think that's probably the most important. The second one is feedback.” Another strong belief about motivational support is that it is directly linked to the team. More specifically Interviewee 3 said “also the more social support, which is like, just feeling like you're part of a team and that's more the Amsterdam team”.

In addition, Interviewee 6 added that “Only those kinds of small interactions that makes it so much nicer to get that motivation part and also both are, you know, extremely hardworking and results driven. And that also motivates you to say, Well, if this lady that is working part time, wants to do 200% for my baby company, how am I not to live up to those expectations?” Last but not least Interviewee 6 mentioned the following: “I feel strong about having sort of a support network in the team and sort of more informal relationships with colleagues and having just fun activities, those kinds of things have really helped me”.

A very common topic that was extracted from the interviews is the need of a different approach towards entrepreneurship. The interviewees expressed the need of re-establishing some rules about entrepreneurship and eliminate the stereotypes of what a successful leader or entrepreneur looks like. Interviewee 6 mentioned “I am an idealist. I do believe that we need more role models that create companies in different ways. And that the media also needs to highlight those and celebrate those. I think too often we see the Zuckerbergs, the Musks, and the Bezos out there, as you know, the Wahala, of how things must be done and should be done. But if you look at the measurement of success is mostly dollar sign.” Interviewee 6 added the need of focusing on also showing the vulnerable parts of them, and also showing not only the struggles, but also a healthy lifestyle, as an example and the need in the entrepreneurial world for diversity and sustainability.



Interviewee 8 said “there is this feeling in entrepreneurship that entrepreneurs are these, like superheroes who do things that no one else can? Yeah, it's tough. It's probably the toughest thing that you could do. Building something from scratch and making it innovative. But when I was working at the UN I was in the point of a mental breakdown because I was working fixed hours, and I felt that I didn't have a voice and I couldn't fit in. For me, that was much tougher than this.” Interviewee 5 mentioned “I think the most important one is a myth that needs to be broken, leaders usually sleep very little. I actually think that sleep is a really big one and also exercise. One of the biggest mistakes that entrepreneurs make is thinking that they need to sprint, and then it becomes all of a long sprint, and at some point, they break down”.

Interviewee 1 added that what is missing is empathy and humility and that there is this toxic culture where they think if you are a CEO or a tech guy, you need to be very arrogant, very brutal, that very loud. Interviewee 2 stated that for entrepreneurs to be successful they need to filter out the negativity because there is a lot of it out there. Lastly Interviewee 7 believes that training will solve some issues with leaders. As mentioned, “a lot of people get promoted at some point into leadership roles without ever being given training, or the only reference you have is the managers you've had in the past, whether you liked or whether you did not like their management style. So, I think it would be very important if we would have some sort of more guidance on how do you manage others what different leadership styles suit you? What works for you? How do you communicate as a leader, how do you indeed work remotely or not? And how do you lead meetings effectively”.



Concluding, the findings demonstrated that working long hours for startups in a virtual environment can stimulate a person in having more energy, because new exciting things make a person wanting to work hard, being excited and having fun with new experiences which leads to a healthier well-being. Furthermore, it is important for the founders when work happens virtually because they can set boundaries between work and social activities as well as cover physical needs. Lastly, the findings highlighted that founding a startup and having employees looking up on their leaders can generate high expectations which can lead to increased stress and higher responsibility, thus impact negatively the well-being.

Next to that, being highly autonomous and taking decisions is concluded to be valuable to well-being since one is able to put barriers, having their ideas heard as well as taking initiative. However, even though autonomy can help a leader having the control at their jobs, providing the correct skills can be rather challenging when happening virtually, considering that the employees need to be energized, motivated and engaged in the right way. That can lead to overthinking the steps in providing the right skills and increase the stress.

In addition, the findings determined the importance of the leaders sharing their role. That leads to a team working closely together and being more empathetic which concludes to higher energy, better support and well-being. Moreover, it is concluded that in current times there is need for motivational support such as support from mentors and advisors, giving or receiving feedback or being part of a team. This can lead into feeling strong and building healthy relationships. Ultimately, the findings suggest that the need of a different approach towards entrepreneurship is evident, to eliminate any stereotypes revolving around a successful entrepreneur.



Discussion

The research topic “An exploration on how the Job-Demand-Support-Control theory impacts the leaders’ well-being whilst in a virtual environment” has been formulated since the researcher was always keen on exploring the well-being of the general workforce at workplace and the impact it has in their everyday lives. The researcher was also interested on exploring ways to improve the employee satisfaction in the workplace and envisioned a world where the workforce is content with their jobs and saw purpose in what they are doing for living.

The above-mentioned concerns have always been a priority to the researcher’s mind because of his own personal experience and aspiration of finding purpose in the workplace. Additionally, according to Sturt and Nordstrom, (2018) 53 percent of Americans are unhappy at work. This is a shocking stat considering that more than half of the population of the US is feeling dissatisfied for something that they are doing 5 times a week or even more.

After the researcher joined Antler, he realised that his concerns were more relevant than before and was convinced that he should address leader’s well-being. Antler is a global early-stage Venture Capital investing in the world’s most exceptional people and aims to create thousands of companies globally that solve real problems. However, Antler’s 12-week program until the initial investment is very demanding and requires high levels of stress resistance in order for the participants to complete it successfully.

Covid-19 transformed entirely the workplace and shifted mostly every organisation’s operations from on-site to a virtual environment. Thus, the researcher decided that now were the most relevant circumstances and timing to explore the virtual environment in the workplace and include it in the research question. Furthermore, the integration of a well established and reliable model namely the JDCS model aimed to give a more structured and focused research direction to the research topic.



During the interviews, the main priority was to answer the three propositions that were defined in the literature review and essentially to answer the main research topic. The first proposition was whether *Job demands diminish leader's well-being whilst in a virtual environment*. Judging from the interviews' responses, and this has been quite a big surprise, this proposition is not being supported. Apparently, every interviewee mentioned that they enjoy pressure because it makes them more active and effective. Seven out of eight interviewees mentioned that as long as they are enjoying what they are doing, they do not mind working long hours. This essentially means that if they enjoy whatever they are doing and they are passionate about their job they do not view Job demands as something that negatively impacts their well-being. Additionally, there seems to be a mismatch between opinions whether the virtual environment is negatively impacting the well-being with regards to the Job demands. Some of the interviewees mentioned that the virtual environment has increased productivity maximizing the number of interviews they can have in a day for instance and minimizing the travel time.

Others mentioned that there are more expectations and responsibilities because they are the leaders, and they are meant to be the example and drive the rest of the team. Finally, mostly everyone expressed the ability to achieve a work-life balance and that they are being able to set their boundaries to accomplish that. For these reasons the above proposition is being disproved. At this point, there is a comment that is worth mentioning. One of the interviewees, off the record mentioned that entrepreneurs are similar to an alcoholic person. More specifically, he said "an alcoholic person if you ask them if they are alcoholic, they will say "of course not, I am handling it" same as an entrepreneur, they might not even realise how busy they are because they are just addicted and might not even admit that their well-being is affected. So, there might be the case of bias and the entrepreneurs did not want to be completely honest.



With regards to the second proposition namely *Job control can facilitate leader's well-being whilst in a virtual environment*, the researcher believes that it is indeed the case. Job control seems to be facilitating a leader's well-being since most interviewees have agreed that having the autonomy and decision authority to execute tasks gives a sense of freedom and power to freely steer the direction of the company. In most cases the interviewees mentioned that they have a co-founder they are relying to for taking major decisions together but depending on their role in the company they also take independent decisions. As far as the virtual environment is concerned there is the opinion that it becomes much easier to take decisions, assign tasks, answer to questions etc. A very important factor is that every stakeholder who is involved in the decision-making is being available and reachable online to facilitate the efficiency of decisions.

Moreover, the virtual environment has also facilitated the development of the leadership skills of the founders in the sense that nowadays they are more focused on the essence rather than the unmeaningful details of a meeting. For instance, now they are more focused on the content of a pitch to convince an investor instead of what they wear or how formal they would be. Another very important aspect is the freedom that the leaders give to their employees. In this virtual environment the interviewees stressed the fact that since it is hard to energize and engage your employees so it's really important that they provide their employees with the flexibility and freedom while working from distance.

According to Carney and Getz, (2018) a liberated company allows employees complete freedom and responsibility to take actions that they—not their managers—decide are best for their company's vision. That does not mean that these firms are unmanaged. On the contrary, the specific actions that we observed in close to one hundred liberated companies prove the opposite. Providing this freedom to the employees directly resonates to the company's performance and consequently directly to the leader's well-being. These facts conclude that this proposition is being supported.



Lastly the proposition *Social support can facilitate leader's well-being whilst in a virtual environment* was the proposition that had the most relevant responses on the connection of the virtual environment and the impact on the well-being. Undeniably the pandemic had a huge impact on organisations and Social support has been more needed than ever. But how do you achieve Social support while being remotely? Most interviewees mentioned that they have been working in a virtual environment even before the pandemic, but the current situation is way different. Remote working without a pandemic can be considered a luxury but remote working amidst a pandemic can be catastrophic for employees in the sense that there is lack of social life.

Founders that have been operating in a virtual setting before mentioned that they are missing the office setup and being able to see their co-workers and be benefitted from the presence of each other even if that was once a week. Additionally, they have been mentioning that in case there is an end of the pandemic their new norm of operating would be to go to the office once or twice a week, to preserve both the flexibility of working from home as well as the keeping the team spirit and support high. They have not mentioned though if they will be renting office spaces for only once or twice a week. This could possibly be a limitation that currently they have not thought. Furthermore, many of the interviewees have mentioned that since they are leaders, they want to keep a firm image towards their employees.

Therefore, they do not open to them but instead they are reaching out to mentors or family and friends when they are seeking support. This practice goes together with the final subtheme that arose from the interviews which is a “different approach towards entrepreneurship”. A potential name for this subtheme could be “Redefining Leadership/Entrepreneurship”. The researcher noticed a potential underlying issue (please refer to alcoholism example) that is present in entrepreneurship. Almost every interviewee has mentioned something related to a different approach towards entrepreneurship. Thus, the proposed solution to the research topic would be beneficial for any entrepreneur who



wants to launch their own startup and in general every leader who is struggling with their well-being.

All in all, this proposition is supported and from the interview responses it needs to be further enhanced due to Covid-19. Already various leading consulting firms have established practices to support leaders through the pandemic. The Centre for Creative Leadership is proposing various supporting tools for leaders and organisations to assist in overcoming the challenges of today and tomorrow. These tools are including sessions on building resilience, virtual teams and remote work, leading in times of crisis and creating personal and organisational agility(CCL, 2021).

“Business problems are not a given but are the result of choices of influential stakeholders: in the context of a ‘mess’ of issues, of opinions and value judgments on those issues, of interests, power and influence, these stakeholders choose an issue, or combination of issues, to work on” (van Aken and Romme, 2012). In the case of the current research topic, the researcher has been carried away from his personal beliefs, keenness on topic and extensive desk research. Therefore, the researcher did not perform a preliminary interview. A preliminary interview with a manager from a venture capital or any similar sector could have helped define better the problem mess and definition.

Using this specific model has proven to be helpful but at the same time somewhat restricting. Helpful because the research was quite focussed on the three aspects of JDCS model but also restricting because the researcher felt during the interviews that he could not deviate a lot from the model which caused some sort of frustration and unease.





CLIENT DELIVERABLE

Professional Product: Booster virtual session on redefining and optimising entrepreneurship

Context and Relevance

Antler is a global venture capital, and its mission is to bring together leaders from all backgrounds to build the defining companies of tomorrow. For a company which its primary stakeholders are the founders/leaders of startups, their well-being should be of highest importance. Antler's program has two phases. The first phase starts after the selection of the founders and lasts 12 weeks. Then there is the investment committee where the teams present in front of the jury to be decided whether they get invested. And if they make it, then the second phase begins which is another 12 weeks of them trying to incorporate their company, develop even more their concept and find partners who are interested in their idea.

The culmination of the program is when the Demo Day happens where the founders present their company in front of an audience to attract investors. Reading all this information, someone will easily realise how intense this program is and how much stress these people must undergo to be successful and make their dream idea become a successful company. Their well-being must be kept on high levels and face every challenge within the program as an opportunity to grow.

The proposed solution is an informative 45-minute booster session for the founders - primarily- of Antler but it could be adjusted for other audiences too. This booster session will address the various methods towards enhancing a leader's well-being and a redefined leadership. It is worth mentioned that the content of this booster session comprised after taking into consideration both primary and secondary data which have been gathered for the execution of this research.



Implementation and Evaluation plan

This session will be delivered at the beginning of each program. The session will be a pilot for the next Amsterdam program which will begin the upcoming October. There will be 3 evaluation rounds. The first evaluation round will be between the researcher and the Amsterdam program manager. Then the researcher will present the session to the rest of the Antler Amsterdam team. If everyone approves, it will be delivered to the founders in October. The session will be evaluated and approved according to Antler's standards and based on the strong opinions of the managing partners. After the session will be delivered, a feedback form will be distributed to the founders to evaluate how successful it was. Based on feedback the global program team will decide whether the session will be part of the program on other locations.

A booster PowerPoint session seemed to be the best implementable solution for Antler because it is aligned with Phase I flow of the program. Essentially this session will be an additional session to the program which will facilitate the participants' well-being, providing them support on how to react in the stressful program and how to view entrepreneurship in general. There will be no costs for this session nor any change management that needs to be performed as this solution is simple, straightforward and easy to execute. The script has been prepared already and the person who will present it to the founders should just familiarise themselves with the slides and the topics that are discussed. In case Antler is greatly interested in a specific topic in the presentation and wants to address it more in-depth, then they will need to hire a professional on that specific area and then indeed there will be incurred costs.

The session includes various topics regarding well-being. It includes ways of engaging with co-founder and colleagues in a remote setting and best practices for keeping a remote team connected. Moreover, topics such as the importance of a mentor for a leader, the importance of redefining entrepreneurship and ways to enhance well-being addressing the importance of factors like sleep, meditation and building resilience.



The session is concluded with a Mentimeter quiz asking the founders to share anonymously their biggest pain point of entrepreneurship. This question will initiate an open discussion between the founders and the Antler team about possible solutions to those pain points that could potentially facilitate founders and relief them from stress to a certain extent.

The Kirkpatrick model could also be used since it is probably the most known model for the analysis and evaluation of the results of training and educational program. It comprises of 4 levels. The first level measures how participants will react to the session, thus the feedback form. Level 2 analyses if they truly understood the session. For this level the manager who will deliver the session will make sure to answer any questions the founders might have. Level three analyses if the founders have started reacting differently and utilized what they learnt. This level might not be the one with the biggest feedback, but its results will reflect on the final level which is level four and deals with results. This level determines if the material had positive impact on the founders and Antler(Kurt, 2016). The session will be considered impactful if the number of dropouts from the program decrease or if the reaching out of burnout founders to the coaches decrease or if we see happier and more productive founders around.

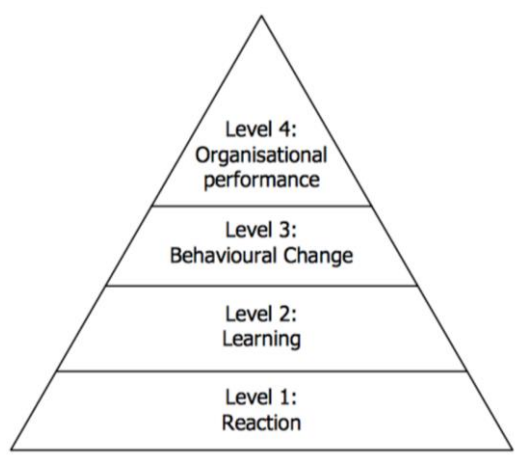


Figure 4: Kirkpatrick model (kirkpatrickpartners, 2021)



Evaluation

The deliverable has been evaluated by the local manager of Antler Hayden Young. On average he evaluated it as “Good” (see app H). Regarding the use of relevant literature and knowledge for the creation of the deliverable, Hayden mentioned that several factors of building a startup were considered. He also mentions that the deliverable provides ways to be a successful entrepreneur while also having the benefits of sleep, meditation and other practices focused on well-being.

Regarding the use of theories and models Hayden mentions that they are missing from the deliverable, but he does not feel that they would be a good fit for this deliverable. The researcher agrees with that statement and has utilized the report as the backend of the deliverable to include theory and models instead of the deliverable itself. Hayden also says that most assumptions are backed with data and the evidence of the founders facing day to day struggles are well underpinned. Regarding the research process, he mentions that assumptions are backed up by some datapoints, but he feels that the analysis could be further develop with more data. The researcher has added an additional literature section in the discussion to further enhance the analysis of the deliverable.

Hayden believes that there is room for improvement for the communication and delivery of the session. Mainly because there was no trial for the session yet, since the next cohort begins next October. Additionally, he believes that the success of the session depends on the person that will execute it. The researcher agrees totally with the last statement also because subconsciously, the deliverable has been designed based on the presentation skills of Hayden. Finally, regarding the performance of the researcher on the project, Hayden mentioned that the project was executed independently with minimal guidance from him. He also mentions that the researcher takes feedback very seriously, has worked with more than 30 cultures throughout the Antler program and that the hospitality mindset is clear. He has marked this section with excellent.

Additional literature

As mentioned before the topics that are addressed in the solution have been identified through secondary research and have been also addressed from the interviewees during the primary data collection. Because new topics arose from the interviews this section will support those topics with additional literature.

The biggest consulting companies in the world have nowadays been busy with researching the future of work post pandemic. In a recent report, McKinsey assesses the lasting impact of the pandemic on various industries with some great insights. As mentioned in the report, the pandemic accelerated trends that may change work forever. A very important trend is that remote work and virtual meetings are most likely to stay in the scenery although not as intense as they were at the peak of the pandemic (McKinsey, 2021). This fact reflects on the relevance of the current study because it shows that the virtual environment will be most likely established and will become the new norm. Thus, the acquaintance and training of leaders managing their workforce is critical. Additionally, the cascading effects that this transition will have in various industries are critical. One can think of the impact of this permanent shift on the demand for office spaces, horeca and retail in downtown areas, public transport and business travel (McKinsey, 2021).

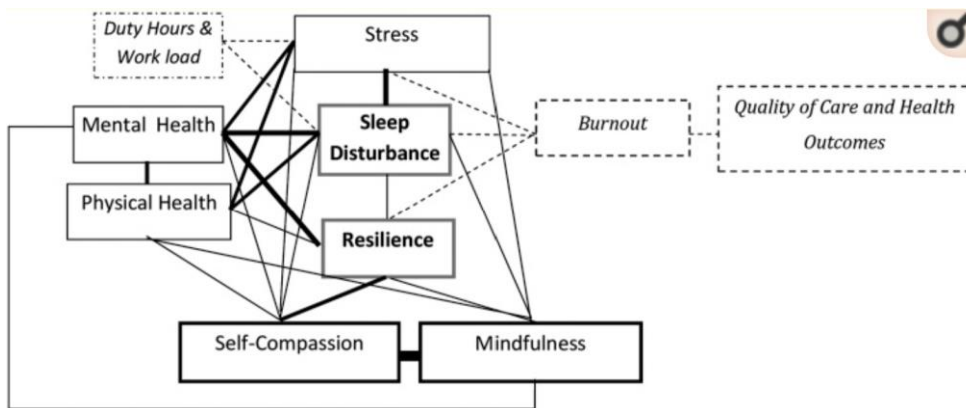


Figure 5: Relationships between stress, health, sleep, resilience, self-compassion, and mindfulness and the goals of high-quality care and health outcomes (Kemper, Mo and Khayat, 2015).



Most of the topics addressed to the deliverable are depicted on figure 5. This conceptual framework is exploring the relationships of different hurdles resulting in burnout and negatively affecting health professionals. The reason why there are no arrows in the figure is because the relationships are correlational and not causational however the direct linkage of all these factors related to burnout and consequently in reduced performance of employees is evident (Kemper, Mo and Khayat, 2015). According to Kemper, Mo and Khayat (2015) suggests that additional training to enhance protective factors from burnout such as sleep resilience and mindfulness. However, as stated in the study there are gaps in understanding the complex connections between factors affecting burnout like sleep, resilience, mental health, and stress and trainable qualities such as mindfulness and self-compassion.

Deliverable design

To be able to construct a successful and insightful booster session, the researcher has executed in-depth research. According to Sommerville(2017) one of the most deadly sins to a PowerPoint presentation is to have a text-heavy slides. It is a requirement that the slides are consistent throughout the presentation and the use of contrast between the text and the background is highly advisable.

Moreover, the researcher aimed to deliver a PowerPoint session similar to the sessions that are delivered in the program. The use of a more informal approach is noticeable throughout the slides as well as the script. The tone of the script is also identical to the majority of other informative/booster/training sessions. Normally the sessions delivered to the founders are straightforward with some humorous and sarcasm hints.

Throughout the design of the deliverable the researcher has been in direct contact with the Program manager to ensure the smooth creation of the session and the alignment with the Antler standards. Moreover, the duration of the session is about 45 minutes similar to the duration of other sessions of the program. A good rule of thumb is of calculating the duration of a session is one minute per slide. The current deliverable is 30 slides but there is an additional quiz/open discussion activity and a feedback form.



Limitations

From the whole study various limitations were identified which might have affected the findings. As mentioned in Data Collection section, the difficulty to secure the interviews was evident and it also reflects on the final number of interviews. The intended number was between 10-12 but in the end only 8 were executed. In reality, there were 9 interviews, but the recording was never saved and could not be tracked. This definitely affects the sample size since the greater the population, the more interviews could have been conducted.

The population could be considered also a limitation for this study. Most participants interviewed for this study were founders of Antler Amsterdam. It might have been different if I would choose to interview other founders of different venture capitals or other locations of Antler to see if there are any major inconsistencies in the program globally.

Additionally, while formulating the interview questions there was more emphasis given on the well-being aspect and less on the JDCS model and the researcher assumed that every participant was working remotely which that was not always the case because some of the participants already implemented a hybrid setup. Also, participants had sometimes difficulty in understanding the questions and were unconsciously directed by the researcher in their responses. All in all, these are all examples that could have been avoided prior to conducting the interview to overcome any bias.

Another possible bias could be that the participants found it difficult to address stress and burnout related challenges since this is a very personal topic. Additionally, being an entrepreneur in such a challenging and competitive environment can be an impediment for someone to admit that they suffer any sort of mental breakdowns. So, the participants could have been biased and statements regarding “workaholism and working 24/7” could possibly be overstatements just to blend in with the demanding environment of entrepreneurship.



An additional limitation was that in the initial literature review and in the whole research in general the cultural and gender and age diversities have not been explored. Reflecting now, the researcher believes that these factors would have provided different insights to the study. Finally, there is a great possibility that the literature review is not complete. Especially now with the pandemic affecting the work setting and shifting to a remote environment there are new insights constantly arising. Unfortunately, it is not possible to be aware of every related study that has been executed in the past regarding the topic so there might be insights that have been simply overlooked.

Further research

Redefining entrepreneurship in a more ethical way is a huge and very controversial topic. The researcher would encourage the further research of this topic as it can have crucial outcomes and solutions that could change for ever the world of entrepreneurship. Further research and possible solutions could facilitate the leaders' well-being by decreasing the high stress levels that could arise at workplace and at the same time change the stereotypes revolving around a successful entrepreneur.

Another topic that is related to redefining entrepreneurship is Quantum leadership. The researcher came across this topic recently and participated in a webinar regarding Quantum leadership. The researcher believes that quantum leadership could be the foundation of a broader research that would aim the radical change of the status quo in entrepreneurship. As mentioned in the limitations the implementation of demographics to population and sampling would be important to extract more reliable data.



DISSEMINATION

During an Antler AMA (Ask me anything) session with the founders we had a pleasant discussion with the founders and partners of Antler about this research. The founders asked what the thesis topic was about and then the researcher explained the research topic. This was while the researcher was in search for interview participants. The researcher spent about 20 minutes explaining to them why he chose the specific topic and shared plenty of early-stage findings. They had some interesting insights to share too but they were really impressed by the fact that the researcher dedicated his research on leaders' well-being. They also mentioned that the JDCS will be very useful to draw conclusions and that the fact that the research is focused on virtual environment makes it very relevant with the current situation. The researcher then managed to convince some of the founders to participate in interviews and received some positive responses.

The second act of dissemination was during a global program call. The program employees of Antler from every location are meeting once every 2 weeks to discuss new topics for the program. The researcher decided to bring up the topic of the research and they agreed to share with them the findings. They have thought that indeed it is a very interesting topic to incorporate in the program and they have agreed to run it in Amsterdam as a pilot and depending on the feedback we get we launch it globally (See app. I). They have also given me an advice not to paint a rosy picture about the Antler program because it is a very intense and challenging program and the founders should be aware of that. What they meant is that it is great to address the well-being of founders and try to enhance it through the session but at the same time they should keep in mind that they need to perform at their highest of capabilities to get funded.





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APPENDICES

A. PoA Assessment form & EC proof

Assessor Feedback:	Excellent <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Pass <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Not Yet <input type="checkbox"/>	
Overall Assessor Feedback		
LYCar Proposal Outcome		

- Excellent ☒ All qualitative criteria awarded a "Pass" and at least three qualitative criteria awarded a "Excellent"
- Pass ☐ All qualitative criteria awarded a "Pass". "P" registered in Osiris. Student can continue with LYCar execution.
- No Go ☐ One or more qualitative criteria graded as "Not Yet". "F" registered in Osiris. Student re-writes LYCar Proposal with incorporated feedback.
- Pre-Condition NY ☐ Pre-conditions not met. Student resubmits LYCar Proposal. No grade or feedback provided to the student.

V. Sisou

Study Progress Overview

Student number	671099	
Date	29 May 2021	
Degree programme	B Hospitality Management - Full-time	Exam Date: 12-04-2019
Cohort	2017	Distinction: Graduated
Study programme	P-HTH-C08-17 - Propaedeutic curr.2008 version 2017	

European Credits (EC)

Study programme	Minimum credits to be obtained	Credits obtained
Basic Programme	60.0	60.0
Others		0.0
Total	60.0	60.0



V. Sisou

Study Progress Overview

Student number	671099
Date	29 May 2021
Degree programme	B Hospitality Management - Full-time
Cohort	2017
Study programme	PP-HTH-C08-17 - Post-Propedeutic curr.2008 version 2015

European Credits (EC)

Study programme	Minimum credits to be obtained	Credits obtained	Passed
Basic Programme	180.0	150.0	No
Others		0.0	
Total	180.0	150.0	No



B. Declaration of confidentiality



Declaration relating to confidentiality concerning research data in Launching Your CAREER (LYCar) programme

The undersigned, Varnavas Sisou
(hereinafter referred to as: the Student), residing in The Hague, Netherlands
Conducting a (research)project for the company Antler Amsterdam
(hereinafter referred to as: the Client), residing in: Amsterdam, Netherlands

Whereas:

- the Student shall, in the context of his or her LYCAR research, gain access to confidential information;
- the Client shall, where appropriate, demand a signed declaration relating to secrecy and confidentiality concerning the information provided in this context;
- this non-disclosure agreement shall, in the event of any discrepancies, take precedence over other contracts or agreements which have been or will be concluded or made between the Student and the Client;

Declares as follows:

1. The Student shall keep confidential any information which the Client or any other party involved in the LYCAR research provides under this contract, and shall not further disclose such information in any way, except insofar as the Student is obliged to disclose it by virtue of any legal requirement or irrevocable decision of a judge.
2. Information, as referred to under 1, refers to all information, including written, verbal, graphic and digital information, or information in any other form, which comes to the knowledge of the Student during the research period and which the Student knows, or can reasonably be expected to know, is of a confidential nature.
3. The Student shall not, without the prior written consent of the Client, disclose any confidential information to third parties or contribute to the publication of confidential information. The Student shall submit the thesis to the supervisor for approval from the Client in respect of confidential information, before making such information available to his examiner(s) at Hotelschool The Hague.
4. This non-disclosure agreement shall be in force for an indefinite period / The Student shall be bound to this obligation of secrecy for five (5) years after signing this declaration.
CHOOSE IN CONSULTATION WITH CLIENT)

Thus declared and signed by:

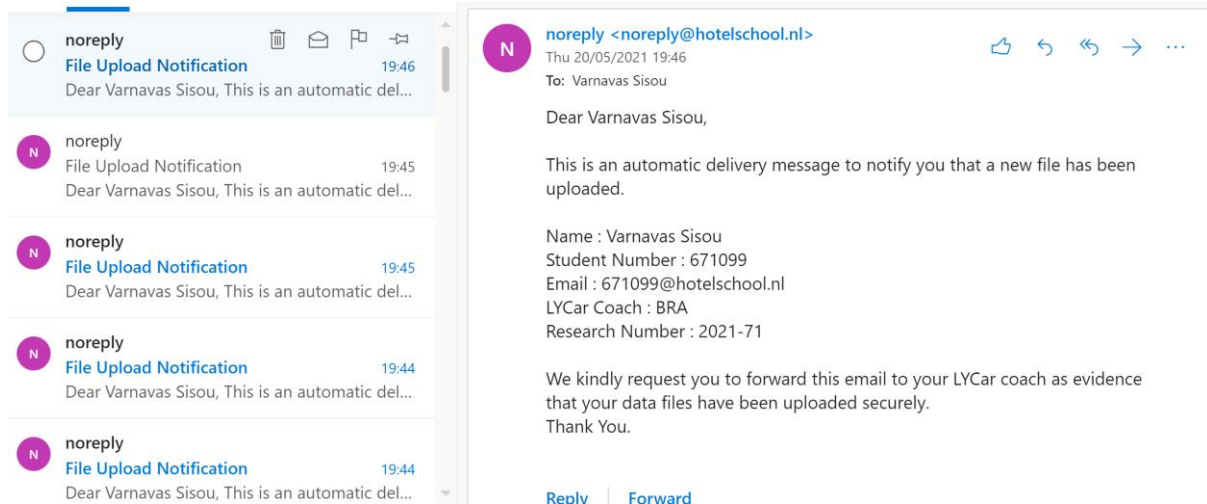
Name: Varnavas Sisou Date: 01 - 03 - 2021.

Place: The Hague Student number 671099

Signature: 



C. Proof of uploaded data collection



D. Interview outline

Introduction	Greet participant and explain the Research topic. Ask current position and capacity of team etc.
Virtual Environment Question	How would you describe the remote work experience during Covid-19? Did your tasks or day-to-day job differentiate. If so in what way? How did this affect you? Would you say this affected your leadership style and skills?
Well-being at workplace	How would you define well-being at a workplace? Is well-being amongst leaders or employees affected by working virtually? If so, in what way? Do you think there is a differentiation between creating well-being for leaders and well-being for employees?

	Why is taking well-being in the workplace into consideration important? How does it influence the workplace?
	How would you describe your overall quality of experience and functioning at work? (important with this question is to ask more in depth questions after the participants answer to get detailed information!)
Job demand (time pressure, long working hours, expectations, workload)	Would you say that your position entails high or low job demands? Why high or low? So to summarise what are some of the characteristics of high/low job demand? How is this affecting your well-being
Job control	In which ways do you feel autonomous. Which extent do you take decisions?
	Would you say that the virtual environment impacted your decision making?
Job support (both operational and motivational/emotional)	Where is your source of receiving support (and what kind of support?). How does the support impact your well-being? Lastquestion: What, in your opinion is important that should be included in improving a leader's well-being.
AOB	Would you like to add any further details to the topic we have discussed?



E. Interview Transcripts

Interview 1

Varnavas Sisou 0:05

All right. Thank you, Kelvin once again, for agreeing to give me some answers to my questions for this interview. For the record, I have informed Kelvin that our recording will only be used for research purposes and all the information will be handled discreetly. Good afternoon Kelvin. Let me start this interview by asking you about your current position, capacity of the team, etc.

Kelvin 0:39

So currently, we just spent the past year fundraising and building the product. So right now we have some paying customers, and we're trying to recruit more tech talent to join the team. So that's where we are at the moment. In terms of what we are doing, I think most of our focus has been to close on the fundraising, because yeah, we can't really move without more people in the team.

Varnavas Sisou 1:12

Could you maybe explain what is the company about?

Kelvin 1:16

So the company is essentially enabling non technical teams to build computer vision models, and manage them and deploy them in one environment. And that the problem that we are really solving is simply Yeah, there's a scarce for machine learning talent today. And we are trying to fill that gap by providing a local platform, easy to use, can be deployed anywhere. And in terms of customers, right now we have more sort of government type of customers using our platform for several use cases. But also, internally, we are trying to sort of find product market fit, because it's like one of those solutions that can pretty much solve any problem. But we are also trying to sort of avoid being the black box and just sort of specialise, at least in one domain. So we are still searching about what's the best direction to follow, even though that people pay. It's also just sort of necessary just to show that the technology has value has been validated, and so forth.

Varnavas Sisou 2:21

Great. And can you please tell me about which position do you have in the company? And if you have anymore employees?

Kelvin 2:31

Yeah. So right now I'm the CEO, of Labelfuse. We just recruited four more people. So we have now in total of six.

Varnavas Sisou 2:43



Perfect, and then the fifth is your co founder, I guess. Yeah. Thank you very much. How would you describe that remote work experience during COVID-19? Did your tasks or day to day job differentiate?

Kelvin 3:03

It's bad to say, but I think, if anything, COVID kinda accelerated a lot of things for us. Because it's like, there was like a huge shift in the market. So everyone is literally like, we don't care how inaccurate AI is, so long, it can automate some tasks. That's important. So for me in terms of how I was engaging with customers before, it's like, pretty much taking me as an opinion leader on how they can implement the technology in their business, because now they feel the need. And then in terms of sort of managing think it's more easier now. Because before it's like you have to travel you have to pay and people are suddenly "I'm very busy, the key decision makers are in some country travelling" now it's like, "yeah, just get on that zoom call, and let's get things done." So, you know, things are way easier for us in terms of how we talk to customers, and what they're looking for. And then I think also it helps because you know, when you're communicating on email, everyone sort of adds a voice to you. But until they get to see you speaking in person, it changes everything. So for me, I'm really good at selling when I'm speaking to a person versus like writing a long email. It's been a blessing in disguise especially with fundraising you send the deck and then they just shuffle it, and then they will come back to you later. But it's like, was COVID there was some sort of a silence in the VC world. So the startups were trying to do something had priority. So we were lucky to get one of those startups that could have anyone in pitch a few minutes. And that's it. I mean, I think if it wasn't for COVID, I could have done the whole reach 100 investors, but because of COVID, you only spoke like 10 and among the 10 we had at least four interested so that did change a lot of How people sort of engage in work. So for us it is more like an advantage.

Varnavas Sisou 5:05

Right. do you think it has developed any leadership skills you have? Or did it alter your leadership style, you think?

Kelvin 5:19

that's a good one. But I think it just improved my leadership skills in a way. Because, I mean, when you're talking to someone on video, versus on an email, or in a boardroom setting, there are so many things to think about, right? You need to think about, like how you dress. So for example, go to P capital, they all dressed up in their fancy suits and some cool cologne. But in COVID, I could just put on a T shirt and pants, I wouldn't be very conscious of myself, I just focus on the content. And same goes for the person who's talking to you on the other hand. It also just brought a whole lot of the human element to who we really are in our in our comfort zones, and just changed how people speak to each other. So even when you're speaking to investors or customers, it's very casual, you're not very like wordy as you would be in a normal world in a suit.

Varnavas Sisou 6:09

Right. Very interesting. And thanks a lot. Moving on to the well being at workplace, if you had to give your definition on well-being at workplace, how would you define it?



Kelvin 6:25

I think well being is if you are able to look forward to your work the next day without feeling like "Oh God, such a drain like I don't want to do this", like having the same enthusiasm as you had yesterday. But obviously, there is moments we are not as motivated, but the enthusiasm is still there. That's one thing because that implies that you do have, like a positive outlook. So to have that it also details your personal life in general, you know, if your personal life is not working out, it reflects in your work as well. So for me, it's all about, not having that feeling of dread that I have to do this every single day. And then also on a personal level, being able to manage, like when people are very uncertain, they become negative. But I would say you need to find out how to manage you know those thoughts, because that's a very difficult thing to do, especially during the pandemic, where one minute you're like, "Yeah, we're about to do it" next day, things are closed. Right, so having a very realistic, optimistic mindset is one of the things that I'm always saying people should cultivate. So I've been doing that a lot. If things are not working out, I focus on things that are really working out with the same energy, the same zeal, instead of like, wailing on what's not working out. And then also just time management right? Now I spend a little bit more time with myself than Work, work, work and that become more productive. I'm going to spend literally eight hours working on my startup. And then the rest of the time, I need to take care of myself. Because you're not productive, because spend 20 hours do the same thing. Right? So rather, spend less and do more.

Varnavas Sisou 8:26

That basically, relates to my next question, if you think well being amongst leaders or employees is affected by working virtually.

Kelvin 8:40

yeah, I mean, in some cases, it is. Because people are very remote. So even if you're in a working environment, it's very easy to gauge people's feeling, especially if sometimes maybe you have co workers who don't want to do video, right. But if you're offline, like in a normal world you'd meet and you sense it, but virtually, it's very difficult to gauge. But then as a leader, it means you have to always do a double check to see you know, is there anything we can do to help? As we all know that maybe besides work, someone in the family is affected by COVID. And that affects you as well. So as a company, your job also is just to make sure like you let everyone know that we also do care about their well being. We might not do anything. But we just listen, if we ever need to talk to just let things out, get some sort of emotional support. But that's one of the things that I'm always emphasising in the team to say whatever is going on, if your pet died, whatever I just say it, because that's important to you.

Varnavas Sisou 9:44

It's amazing because you are foreseeing my next question, because next question is, if you think there is a differentiation between creating well-being for leaders and well being for employees, and And who do you think it's responsible for the well being of leaders, if you basically just said that you're responsible for your employees, but who is responsible for your well being then.



Kelvin 10:13

So for example, in my case, I have mentors. I have people outside my line of work that I look up to as well. So those are the people that I can easily, you know, open up to over certain things. And I will depend on them, because if within the team, they realise that oh, my God, our CEO is such a crybaby, then, yeah, once the team begin to lose that sort of confidence in you, you need to have a healthy balance between empathy, and being overly dramatic, so to speak. So I'm always trying to avoid coming off as you can't depend on me with your emotional staff because of my own emotional stuff that I'm going through, right. So you need to have that balance where your team has a sense of trust in you, and then you as a person, you're not just holding on everyone's issues, because it's going to break eventually, you need to find someone who has the capacity to help you navigate. So I also have my own mentors who helped me go through that. And then also, I always tried to make sure that you create an environment where you don't have so much negative issues bottled up among employees, because they'll still get back to you at the end of the day.

Varnavas Sisou 11:30

maybe to clear this question, but how do you think that a negative well being would influence the workplace? Or what's the impact Do you think?

Kelvin 11:42

Yeah, so I'm very big on energy. So I always say, if people are not motivated, and they're just down it's going to reflect in your customers product. So essentially, you might lose in the long term. So you really need to be very careful with, you know, how people feel about themselves and what kind of struggles they have because during a startup is hard, and people need to be given as much fuel as they need both mentally and physically just to keep going. Because running a startup is just a bunch of holes, and you need to be able to have the stamina to go through it regardless.

Varnavas Sisou 12:36

Yeah, yeah. How would you describe your well-being at the at your current position?

Kelvin 12:46

Well stressful. Yeah, cause I'm always stressing all the time(laughs). But I'm managing in my own way. So I'm stressful, but not to a point where, that I need to do this Sabbatical I need to go sleep in a couch... It is manageable stress, because if that wasn't the case, then something's broken somewhere. So that's how I managed so right now I'm able to manage my stress, I'm going through like a lot because mentally as a CEO, you have this grand vision, this timeline. And then reality has different stories. Maslow has different story. So all that together, it just crushes you. So you have to find ways to still adapt and keep moving.

Varnavas Sisou 13:29

All right. Thank you very much. Maybe an additional question on that. Would you say that this stress is helping you moving forward?



Kelvin 13:41

Yeah, yeah. I work well under pressure. When things are very comfortable I become paranoid, I'm like, there's no way things are this good. Something is wrong, like the world generally is against you. But if things are just too too smooth, something is wrong, right? And usually, this sort of stress and pressure is really what gets me thinking that the adrenaline is like, "Okay, I'm enjoying this". If there's anything that pisses me off, is when people just decide to do nothing, just because things are hard. For me. It's like, yes, let's find ways this is an amazing (feeling). Let's see, you know, because we are all claiming to be smart. Let's see if this is true. Let's tackle this issue. So for me, the stress is just the identity that I need to get things done.

Varnavas Sisou 14:27

right. And this is the next section of my interview, which is about the job demands, and you already named basically three of them, which is stress and pressure and demands. So would you say that your position entails high or low job demands and if you could name a few more of those job demands, that will be a great.

Kelvin 14:59

It's very high demand. The way I see it is people have given up on good paying jobs, putting their families on the line following a startup. So I need to make sure that they believe in it, I need to make sure that they are financially covered. So that implies that you know, you need to do your fundraising, I need to make sure that the product works. Because I still do where money is going to come in to get those fundings. There's competition for good talent in the market. So I need to create this environment that just attracts good people to join. Even if we don't pay well. But to get the company to that stage, where it's a good place to be, it implies a lot of personal working as well. Because if my personality is crap, people be like, "yeah.....", so there's also like, personal improvement that I need to sort of undergo, like, for example, I need to know that hey, before in your 20s, you need to vent out over certain issues. But now you need to learn self control, you need to be able to be very rational in very, very emotional situations where everyone is like, breaking, you should be the guy just to have a balance at the end of the day. So that's a lot of evolving as a person to reach that point where you sort of able to sort of cope with all these demands, because I mean, one minute, you receive a long email, the next minute, you need to have this meeting, they're all important. And you don't really want to say no to everyone, because they all add to this one thing that you're trying to build. So it's stressful Yes it's demanding, yes, but just find sort of a healthy balance, you know, and prioritising what is and what isn't.

Varnavas Sisou 16:52

Thank you for prioritising me then. Because you also have those people asking you for interviews. So thank you so much for that. Okay.

Kelvin 17:06

I mean, also, the thing is, what I've learned in life is I've gotten to where I am today, because somebody helped me. So it's not like, I'm just the smart guy, bla bla bla. So if somebody



needs help somewhere, you don't know what that means to them. So I just help out when I can

Varnavas Sisou 17:23

appreciate it so much. So if I understand correctly, it's not only internal things that create this high job demand, but it's also external things, like you said, like people are basically, depending on you, people left their high paid jobs and stuff like that. So you also have this emotional pressure that you really need to perform. Well, alright. So, again, the question is, is it negatively affecting your well being you think?

Kelvin 18:05

You know, the funny thing with that question is like, being an alcoholic. you know, people be like, are you an alcoholic? they reply No, I just love alcohol. (laughs) I think I've lived in such a big bubble. We have sort of normalised this. But telling if it's a problem or not, it's very difficult, because I sort of have a limit. It's taking a toll when I become purely logical with a person minus empathy, then I know I do not address that situation well. So, it does definitely have a negative impact to a certain extent. Yep.

Varnavas Sisou 18:54

All right. Yeah, thanks a lot. Then moving on to the next section, which is job control. And my question is, in which ways do you feel autonomous? And to which extent do you take decisions? Obviously, you're the CEO, so but the question here really is if the virtual environment impacted your decision making?

Kelvin 19:17

Not at all, I think, if anything, it just sort of just put me in the spotlight. I mean, I've been working virtually pretty much for a very long time. So for me, it's not like a new experience. But for people that we on boarded, it's always How do I address this? How do I handle this, you know, so if anything, it has actually given me the whole codependency triangle that you need in a team where it's like, we need the CEO without the CEO, this won't fly. So that also enables me now to sort of delegate and push my vision forward within the team to say okay, since you don't know how to navigate these waters, here's how we're going to do it.

Varnavas Sisou 20:03

So you would say that it even increased your autonomous levels and decision making.

Kelvin 20:14

yes because right now, there's just too much unknowns. And for me, purely everything that I'm doing is based on experience intuition and just hustle that others in the team don't have. So there's always that sort of belief from the team that okay, he knows what he's doing. Let's just follow him whatever that is, yeah.

Varnavas Sisou 20:35

Do you think the pace of taking a decision has decreased or increased? Or it didn't change?



Kelvin 20:45

decreased! Right now, we don't spend a day before we decide on anything. We just say, Okay, if it's something that people cannot think through within 24 hours, (inaudible)

Varnavas Sisou 21:05

And why do you think is this virtual setup impacted this? decision making?

Kelvin 21:12

Because there is this uncertainty, right? So it's like, we don't know what might happen tomorrow. But right, now we have the chance to decide on something, right? for example, we had a customer. So it was like in between the pandemic and he's like, yeah, you should come for a meeting today. So we show up for a meeting. So it turns out, we showed up like an hour early. And the customer says, Yeah, you need to show up in the next hour. And then my co founder, is like, yeah, I need to go pick up my kid in the next hour. And then this customer only speaks Dutch and I don't speak Dutch, right. And we ended up just leaving and the deal just died. Because the very following day, when we thought we were going to postpone the customer said, yeah, we just decided to close until COVID. So from there, we figured, yeah, if a decision has to be made, now you have all the variables in place, just hit it.

Varnavas Sisou 22:13

But you still say that the virtual environment dramatically decreased the decision making? So it's a matter of basically developing on those, radical decisions?

Kelvin 22:29

Yes.

Varnavas Sisou 22:31

All right. final section, and you already covered the support before, mentioning your mentors that you go to when you need support. Is that operational or motivational support, you're seeking from your mentors,

Kelvin 22:48

It's more motivational,

Varnavas Sisou 22:51

motivational

Kelvin 22:53

A person outside, your company doesn't really know what's happening.

Varnavas Sisou 22:58

So where do you reach out to when you need operational support?

Kelvin 23:05



Well, I've tried once, but we never really got like the right kind of help we needed. So we tried to have like, mentors who are part of the team purely for the operational side of things, given their experience. But it never turned out as planned, like nothing practical. I think also just the team culture, we always say we don't want to spend too much time in analysing things, whether it be out then learning based on what's actually happening in the real world. So we haven't really had like a very strong operational sort of outreach in terms of support.

Varnavas Sisou 23:46

So it's mostly motivational support you're seeking out? And does this maybe develops your well being and do you feel more efficient/effective?

Kelvin 24:01

It does. I mean, the thing is, when you're in a startup, you you exist in this bubble, right? And when you have these problems, usually a problem just the repetition of the problem in front of you. So you just replaying the same scene and all the possible negative outcomes but until somebody external with a different outlook gives you a new view, it just gives you sort of new energy so it does help a lot.

Varnavas Sisou 24:27

And any other people you might think that you're reaching out to for motivational or is it just the mentors?

Kelvin 24:35

Personally, I've also been reaching out to like mostly like people who've had exits that retired because they're not asking for anything. Like at this stage if you ask for mentors they will say "oh I need shares in your company" like for talking, are you kidding? But when you go to people who have succeeded, they have done exits before then they understand where you are. To a point where You don't even have to explain everything. They just get you because they walk the same path. It's a different story. So I've been reaching out to guys like, there's a guy in South Africa is like an uncle He's one of the biggest VCs slash millionaire. And then also Justin Khan, from Justin TV as well.

Varnavas Sisou 25:32

But then since they are also experienced, maybe they can help you with operations as well. Oh, yeah.

Kelvin 25:40

So usually, they would like hint, once in a while, They say maybe you could try out this strategy. But for me, I just don't want them to. Because normally it becomes too much of a business talk. I just need them to inspire me because I really like what they've done before. And I just want to see how they did it. You know, like, how did they go through these disappointing moments where they just felt like they want to give up. because believe me, like you literally feel like giving up every single day, there's always something that will make you go, why am I doing this? And then for the operational side of things, in our in our area of technology it's always changing all the time. So one person will tell you this strategy. And if you as a founder, you haven't had like a very strong sort of vision that you



want to pursue. You get influenced by these people who succeeded. And you might get misled, because you'll be mistaking their past victories to be a roadmap to something entirely new. And you follow that. That's why I say sometimes is good to take operational support. But if someone has never really built a company before, it's very difficult to take the advice, right? Because they don't really know what's happening out there. People would say no, this research this theory, blah, blah, blah. And I'm like, Yeah, but it doesn't apply to everything. Right? Yeah. You need to find that sort of insight. And you need sort of develop on that and follow that.

Varnavas Sisou 27:29

And every case is different. It's no fit for all. Obviously.

Kelvin 27:35

exact like I always laugh is like, "Oh, no, you guys should do like a SaaS model" like this is machine learning. We are dealing with pixels that change by the second you cannot have like one product and resale So yeah, it's, it's a story for another day. But yeah.

Varnavas Sisou 27:50

Final thing, what do you think is important that should be included in improving a leaders well being?

Kelvin 28:01

I think empathy, and humility. Yeah, there's this toxic culture where they think if you are a CEO or a tech guy, you need to be very arrogant, very brutal, that very loud. Like, I've seen investors, like, Oh, my God, you guys, you're very humble, you're very cool. I'm like what do you mean, like, you need to be very aggressive. And then when you look at the people that they're referring to, these are just people just being like assholes, essentially, at the end of the day. And then the way they treat people that they work with, they have this corporate setup, where it's like, I'm the boss, I tell you, whatever, you follow, right? And then you find like people that you're working with, and literally like putting Excel sheets, just from day one, my boss did this, blah, blah, blah, because you have a toxic culture in place. So I always say, build empathy, and really try to connect with people that you're working with, not just on, like, on a very functional level. So this is what we do. This is your role. That's it, like really tried to be in their feet. Because once you do that, believe me in the most uncertain times, they'll be there for you. Because they'll just that's what people remember. They just went oh my god, I was going through this and this guy remembered and they'll just stick around. I mean, I've seen it happen within our team when I am like, Guys, we didn't receive the second tranche, so we won't get paid and they say, Oh don't worry we use our own money, and still continue going and I'm like damn, and it's not because I did anything, but just empathy and just really being there for them. And then also just humility. I think the more approachable you are in terms of people connecting with you, the more help that you get. Nobody wants to help somebody who's very arrogant and very proud. So I think those are some of the things that people are missing out. Usually people promote this you have to be very manly. I'm like guys, it's not necessary. If you can do the job. If you can execute But what's important is really connect with people. Because at the end of the day, like everything that we're doing on top of everything, it's about people.



Varnavas Sisou 30:08

Preach. Thank you so much. This has been really insightful. Would you like to add any further details to the topics just to conclude, or Oh, no,

Kelvin 30:19

no

Varnavas Sisou 30:21

thank you very much. That was that was the indeed the final question. And I'd like to conclude our interview here and thank you once again for willing to take part in it and I'm going to stop the recording now.

Interview 2

Varnavas (00:03):

All right. Michael, thank you so much once again, for accepting having this interview with me just for the record, I have informed Michael that our recording will only be used for research purposes and all the information will be handled discretely. Hey, Michael. Let me start this interview by asking you a general question about your current position and what you're doing within the team.

Mikhail (00:36):

Sure. I'm currently the co-founder and CEO of a company called Cooper Pet Care. Cooper pet care is a mobile first pet healthcare platform, which provides online vet telemedicine coupled with a mobile first pet health insurance as well as behaviors and nutritionist consultations. So basically we are a one-stop shop for pet owners when it considers their health of their pets.

Varnavas (01:09):

Perfect. Thank you so much. How would you describe the remote work experience during COVID 19?

Mikhail (01:17):

Yeah it's interesting. Well, first of all, let's be honest, I'm not fully remote. So the coworking space that we are working in is still open. So I have an opportunity to come to the office from time to time, but the whole team is remote, right. So my co-founder is mostly remote and all of our team is remote. That's been you know, fine so far and specifically because right now we are mostly focused on building the product. So that's an engineering kind of team. Engineering team anyways is remote. You know, we've got engineers from Belarus, Russia, Ukraine those kind of countries and you know my co-founder and CTO manages them. It's working pretty fine. I personally miss the personal interaction and you know, the bond that you can make being physically in one space and chatting over the coffee, or even the Friday drinks. But so far on the professional side of things it's going pretty well.



Varnavas (02:28):

Right. So did your tasks or day to day job differentiated in any way?

Mikhail (02:36):

Well, not really. We are pre-launched, so we haven't launched yet. We're mostly speaking to investors, raising money and talking to business partners etc. So we don't really have employees on an operational side yet. The exposure to COVID has been limited. I would personally love to meet, our business partners in person. I think there's a value in that. In having a personal conversation rather than over zoom, but the fact that everyone in the same position right, and everyone needs to do their jobs and investors still need to find companies to invest and business partners still need to find partners to invest because everyone in the same position I think it's been going so far pretty good. So we are basically like one day away from signing a major document with our insurance partner. And I haven't met them in person yet. Right. It was only over zoom. So that's that. But, I still kind of miss the old times that I can't wait for things to get back to normal, or maybe I'm the old fashioned guy. But I, personally don't believe in a hundred percent remote type of work. I think it's going to be a hybrid type of thing. But yeah, that's that.

Varnavas (04:16):

Would you say this situation affected your leadership style or skills?

Mikhail (04:26):

That's a good question. I think it did, I think it put a much more emphasis on being much more articulate because when you're not speaking one to another and use Zoom calls, or Google handouts, and usually there's breakouts, there's some noise, etc. I think I had to become much more clear in messages that I want to come across and those kinds of things. So I think I became like more crisp and, or it pushed me to become more crisp and more to the point because there's certain limitations with video chats.

Varnavas (05:33):

Right. How, how would you define well-being at workplace?

Mikhail (05:45):

Well-being at workplace is if you actually like doing your job. It basically is "How do you feel waking up in the morning?" Are you excited about your work day or like, "Oh. You know, I can't wait for the Friday to end". So I can, explain like that. And you know, my goal is to build a company where people love, to do their work. Not specifically come to the office because I don't think that at the end of the day, we'll be in the office five days a week. Those times have probably gone. But I do believe in the hybrid sessions and the most important thing is, people loving what they're doing or hating what they do. So for me, well being as loving what you do. Being passionate about it.

Varnavas (06:40):



Do you think well-being amongst leaders or employees is affected by working virtually? If so in what way?

Mikhail (06:48):

Yeah, I think so because like it or not, it is an important aspect of jobs if you're an employee or if you business leader or whatsoever, but important, also one of the important aspects of a job or working in the company is social aspects. So, you know, you meet, you actually make friends there. So I have a couple of good friends that I met at my workplaces in previous company. And it's kind of hard to do that over Zoom. If you didn't have a preexisting relationship with your coworkers, it's really hard to build this bond over zoom. It's just those little things, right? So chatting over coffee at the cooler or Friday drinks in person, those kind of things. You remember that we try to do at Antler Friday drinks over Zoom. I personally believe it's not a great thing, right. So, because you're sitting there alone in your room feeling like an alcoholic (laughs). So yeah unfortunately the remote things take out the social component of working together and it's bad, right? So it makes it much more harder to create this stronger bond and create friends outside of the work. Yeah, that's that.

Varnavas (08:28):

Do you think there is a differentiation between creating well-being for leaders and well-being for employees?

Mikhail (08:40):

In my personal opinion, the leaders are happy as long as you know, the company is going in the right direction while employees are happy as well. That's an important aspect. So we were talking about it with Pavel (co-founder) and we both agree on that we actually want to create a workspace where everybody loves what they're doing. And that energy feeds the leader as well. But on top of that as a business leader, you have additional tasks, like bringing the company to the next level, right. Getting into profitability, et cetera, et cetera. So those things that you don't worry that much when you're an employee. So yeah, that's it.

Varnavas (09:36):

Right. So how would you describe your overall quality of experience and function at work?

Mikhail (09:49):

I would say out of five, it would be three and a half to four. And I mean, we're still going strong, right? So we're effective. We managed to to build a company and, you know, get the initial funds and going strong during the pandemic. Right. So we started the company in the pandemic. So this is a good thing. I do miss the social component, right. I do miss the making friends small chats, those kind of things. I think it hurts my well-being firstly maybe because I'm more of an extroverted person. But yeah like if I grade it out of five, I would say three and a half to four.



Varnavas (10:35):

Just a clarifying question. But are you giving this score because you're missing the social aspect?

Mikhail (10:42):

Yeah. If there was a social aspect probably it would be four and a half or five. But because of that, it's three and a half to four, because, we managed to meet our goals despite the pandemic. So that's what makes me feel good.

Varnavas (11:04):

All right. Thank you very much. Let's move on to the next session section, which is about the job demands. Would you say that your position entails high or low job demands?

Mikhail (11:18):

I would like to describe it as high and the reason is because the success of the company depends on me and my co-founder like, nobody's going to do those things for us. And nobody cares about the company more than we do. So that's just like a huge pressure that you have to deal with everyday. And there are good days. There are bad days but like the fact that the growth or success of the company depends on me and my co-founder is definitely high pressure.

Varnavas (12:05):

And would you like to name a few of the characteristics of a high job demand like you explained?

Mikhail (12:12):

Yeah, so for me, a high job demand is not specifically, you know, the time spent on the job or whatever. I can, I can do this 24/7. That's not an issue. For me high demand is.... For example, when I was an employee the success of the company did not depend on me. It depends on multiple people. And you know, there were times where, I laid back a bit and the company is still going to be fine. In the current position I'm in it's totally dependent on me and my co-founder right. So I cannot rest. I cannot think, I cannot really turn off because I know if I do then, everything that we've built so far is gonna go crumbling down.

Varnavas (13:13):

Right. But you mentioned that the workload is not, or the long working hours which basically these two aspects and entail high job demand, as I understood are not really something that bothers you.

Mikhail (13:32):

No, for me, these two aspects are not bothering me at all. I think because of two reasons, number one, when it's not your job, but it's actually your baby when you are creating the company it doesn't matter how much [time you spend]. There's just a different aspect of it or it's much more rewarding. So every hour you spend or every extra hour you've spent, it's



just much more rewarding.. So that's one thing. Another thing I think I got used to this, right? So I basically, from the start of my career, i worked long hours. So I worked with consulting, which notoriously has a bad work-life balance. And I spent there seven years, and then I spent another seven years in hypergrowth startups which is also super demanding. I think in a way I just don't know anything better (laughs) Like for me, a job always means long hours. And I think I just got used to it and that's how it is for me.

Varnavas (14:35):

So you do recognize that it's a high job demand work space, but not something that affects you in particular?

Mikhail (14:51):

Not at all. It doesn't affect me. Again, the aspect of it is different. When you're creating a company, you're mostly creating a company for yourself, right. So are you willing to put as many hours as possible! So yeah, like it doesn't bother me at all. The high demand aspect of working long hours. I mean, when you hate your job, long- working hours can like completely crush you. But because of the fact that we love what we're doing, it doesn't bother us.

Varnavas (15:37):

And I believe the same counts for other aspects of job demand. Like, let's say expectations or interpersonal conflicts or pressure?

Mikhail (15:55):

yeah, I guess so. the thing is that we don't really have a team, so we don't have a lot of those things that you mentioned so far. Like maybe when we're 20, 30 people in a team, there will be like interpersonal conflicts, et cetera, and we'll have to deal with it. So far there's not because it's me and my co-founder and a couple of engineers that are that are working on the product.

Varnavas (16:25):

Great. Moving to the next section, it's about job control. I would Like to ask you, in which ways do you feel autonomous?

Mikhail (16:38):

In pretty much everything. Right. The fact that it's our company and we steer it in the direction we want is helpful. So we are completely autonomous in that sense. If you think about it, we have to adapt to investor needs because we have to raise money. We're in the type of business that needs fundraising. So if you think about it, like the investor community might be our boss in a sense control where we steer. Because we are in the type of business that we can't bootstrap. So we actually need to raise funds and we depend on investors in that sense. But other than that it's completely autonomous for sure.

Varnavas (17:50):



And which extent do you take a decisions then?

Mikhail (17:53):

To a full extent, right. So it's, me and my co-founder. The most important decisions we discuss together or some of the decisions in, our areas we do autonomously. So for example, Pavel decides on his own and with his own team, like which tech stack to use, because I don't know anything about that. Or I do financial modeling, those kinds of things, and working with the business partners. But there are multiple decisions that we discuss together. Like strategy wise, do we take the insurance aspect that we do the healthcare kind of aspect for, those stuff we discuss it together with Pavel. But yeah, it's basically like me and my co-founder.

Varnavas (18:43):

And is it common that you guys agree most of the times?

Mikhail (18:54):

Yeah, I, think I'm super lucky. We are lucky to have each other because we generally have a very similar view. So we don't, fight whatsoever. And we always find, even in times where we disagree, we always find a compromise. So there hasn't been yet a single time where we had like a fight or even a heated debate over something.

Varnavas (19:20):

Thank you. How did the virtual environment impacted your decision-making?

Mikhail (19:31):

Not so much to be completely honest with you! I think the reason is I try to make my decisions based on data. And it doesn't really matter whether the data comes from interpersonal conversations or through Zoom or Slack or whatever. So I don't think the decision-making is affected, but it is important to say..... We haven't really started the hiring process at all. And I think when we come to the hiring, the zoom aspect of it all might change the decision-making. So you might, lean more into hard skills and CV those kinds of things versus just interpersonal feel for a person. But we'll see maybe ,the pandemic will be over when we start hiring.

Varnavas (20:35):

Thanks a lot. Lastly, the final section it's about support. So where is the source of receiving support and what kind of support?

Mikhail (20:50):

Yeah I think like a couple of things. Definitely a family support is important one, right? So if you're receiving this emotional support from the family is very rewarding. but another really important thing is feedback from customers, investors, and business partners. So like when we bring it up with when we take Cooper our idea and talk to investors and we'd get the positive feedback, it's super, super rewarding. So it makes you think that, you know,



we're on the right track, we're doing something right. But also if you have, bad days and you've been rejected here and there that's extremely painful. So it's a roller coaster with a really high swings. Let's put it this way.

Varnavas (21:46):

Thanks. Cause you basically answered my next question which was how does this support impact your well-being? And thank you, cause you also answered both emotional and operational. So to summarise your co-founder and other partners are there for the operational support and friend and family for the emotional?

Mikhail (22:13):

Yeah, exactly. So yeah, I think it's very important to, to have family support. It would be much harder to do it alone or it's much harder.

Varnavas (22:33):

Yeah. great. So last question! What, in your opinion is important that should be included in improving a leader's well-being?

Mikhail (22:47):

Can you repeat the question? I'm not sure....

Varnavas (22:50):

What in your opinion is important that should included for the improvement of leaders well-being?

Mikhail (23:13):

Whenever, an aspiring entrepreneur tells you about an idea. Don't bash it. Don't shoot on it because it's their baby. So they care about it a deep way. So I had those conversations with you know, friends and I told them about this idea and they would go like, Oh, this is stupid. And this is like extremely hurtful. So don't do it. Whenever you hear, you know, your friend comes with some idea try to understand it before jumping into conclusions because you might hurt their feelings.

Varnavas (23:58):

So maybe to summarize it a bit, you would say, don't get too overwhelmed or too sensitive on other people's opinion?

Mikhail (24:10):

Yeah, exactly. So there's two sides of it as an entrepreneur. You, have to learn how to filter out the negativity because there's going to be a lot of it. So there's going to be a lot of negativity. There's going to be a lot of skepticism about what you're doing like, "Oh, why you're wasting time trying to build a stupid company or when you know, be a partner at McKinsey," or whatever. Right. so be aware of that and learn how to filter it out, but also as a friend. So you know if you have a friend who's coming up with an idea support them.



So, it is important for for them don't jump into conclusions, don't bash their idea, don't say stupid. Even if you think it is (laughs).

Varnavas (25:03):

you basically covered both ways then. And in a company setting, what would you say that is something that could improve the leaders well-being?

Mikhail (25:22):

I guess the feedback. So the constant feedback would be interesting

Varnavas (25:43):

Feedback from employees and also.....?.

Mikhail (25:47):

From Employees. Yeah. Yeah.

Varnavas (25:55):

Right. Michael, thanks so much. Would you like to add Any further details to the topic we have discussed?

Mikhail (26:02):

No. I think, I think everything went well, at least from my side.

Varnavas (26:08):

From my side too. I'd like to thank you once again for spending time with me and giving me all these valuable answers and this concludes our interview here.

Mikhail (26:26):

Thanks a lot. Sure. Thank you. It was great.

Interview 3

Varnavas (00:03):

Yeah. Good morning Anouk. Thank you for being here and agreeing for helping me out with my thesis. For the record I have informed that our recording will only be used for research purposes and all the information will be handled, handled discreetly. Let me start this interview by asking you to introduce yourself and explain tome some things about your current position within the company.



Anouk (00:37):

Yeah, so I'm doing global portfolio management at Antler, which means that I support our portfolio companies, especially the top performing portfolio companies and the ones that are looking to expand or move abroad, helping them raise (money), helping them grow, connecting them to our network and also building intelligence at Antler internally and building our brand as a top leading VC externally.

Varnavas (01:12):

Perfect. Thank you very much. How would you describe the remote work experience during COVID 19?

Anouk (01:21):

I think it's actually been a good experience for me. There's been a lot of back and forth in terms of things that I tried out. But I think I found a good rhythm in the end. So yeah, overall a good experience.

Varnavas (01:38):

Yeah. Did your tasks or day to day job differentiate? and if so in what way?

Anouk (01:46):

No, not so much. The main thing I would say that changed is the management of interns, just because it basically took a lot more time because you had to check in more formally more often. So that took a bit longer, that took more of my time. But other than that, because I already had kind of a good established relationship with my managers It wasn't too much of a problem.

Varnavas (02:17):

So how, did this affect you other than time management? Was there anything else?

Anouk (02:26):

I think it made me more flexible to kind of follow my natural rhythm in the sense that I can just be super focused and block my time and kind of stick to it. So being more in control of my time which was very helpful. Yeah, I think I've been more productive overall.

Varnavas (02:57):

And would you say this situation affected your leadership style?

Anouk (03:08):

I don't think so. No, I don't think so. In the global role anyways, when we moved to remote when I was working for the Amsterdam team that was a bit of a transition, but in this role that I'm at now, most of my work would be remote anyways. Right. So it would be with the other teams in other locations. So in that sense, I don't think it's affected, it's definitely



a component that it's harder to work with people that you've never ever met in person. But it's not necessarily related to COVID and having to work from home.

Varnavas (03:47):

Yeah. Yeah. Makes sense. All right. Let me move to the next section, which is well-being at workplace. How would you define well-being at a workplace?

Anouk (04:02):

I think well-being at the workplace is mainly feeling like you're in control. Like you have some sort of control over your time, control over your own success. Cause sometimes you're measured (based on), your ultimate objectives (And especially at the global level, like the global objectives are that we have) this percentage of teams that get funded. Now it's definitely not a hundred percent under my control, whether they get funded or not. A lot of it is whether VCs are very active at this point in time. Like the quality of the team itself, all these types of things that I don't really have a lot of control over. So I think that affects well-being a lot. And then having control over the tasks in your time, that's probably more to do with trust and the team and with your manager that they just know that you're going to get it done.

Varnavas (05:12):

All right. So if I have to summarize two things that you mentioned that will be control and sorry, what was the other thing? (TRUST)

Anouk (05:29):

Yeah, I mean, control, it could be like misinterpreted, if you say it like that, right. like, it's basically control over your own tasks and your own time and your own success. Which you get through having a team that kind of trusts you and yeah.

Varnavas (05:50):

All right. Would you say that well-being amongst the leaders or employees affected by working virtually?

Anouk (06:01):

Probably yeah. I mean, so in some sense it's improved and in other.... There are positive and negative factors and for some people that's going to be a net positive and some, for some people is going to be a net negative. So I know that for me, for example, going to the office at least one day a week with everyone else that's really positive and it really helps. And it brings a lot of value, but going to the office five days a week, that doesn't bring much more value.

Varnavas (06:38):

which are those elements that you would see that they bring value while being to the office once a week?



Anouk (06:49):

Well, like the social interaction, the team building, especially when there's new team members. I think if I was, if I got into a new team, it would be very difficult to kind of get the hang of it and get to know people and how they work and just the social aspects that make work so much more enjoyable. So then I would probably want to be in the office like four or five days a week. But because I already have relationships, I think one day a week is fine. So those are the things that bring a lot of value being in the office. I think if you have better relationships, I think you do better work, but it's really mostly just personal well-being. And then the things that bring value from being at home is like being more flexible, being able to work out whenever you want, not having to commute and waste time and these types of things.

Varnavas (07:49):

Yeah. Do you think there is a differentiation between creating well-being for leaders and well-being for employees?

Anouk (07:59):

No. No. No. I mean, it trickles down, right? Like if one person's not happy, then typically it is going to impact their team overall.

Varnavas (08:19):

Perfect. Thank you very much. Why is taking well-being the workplace into consideration so important? What do you think it influences? How do you think it influences the workplace?

Anouk (08:35):

Well, typically your best people are just going to leave right? (chuckles). it depends on which industry you're in and VC is quite competitive and there is a lot of talent out there, so the talent supply, isn't that tense, but it's still very costly when someone leaves and you have to rehire. And if you're in an industry that's a bit more competitive, where the talent is a bit more scarce, like tech, that just won't work.

Varnavas (09:09):

So if I understand correctly, you're creating a connection between employee turnover and well-being.

Anouk (09:21):

Talent Retention.

Varnavas (09:23):

Right. Okay. more of a personal question. How do you describe your overall quality of experience and functioning at work?

Anouk (09:39):



Can you be more specific?

Varnavas (09:40):

Yes, of course. So let's say, how would you rate, let's say your well-being at Antler and how do you experience everyday working life?

Anouk (10:01):

I would rate my well-being as pretty good. So if we go back to kind of the things that make up like well-being to me, right? So I have a ton of flexibility. I have a ton of trust from my manager. I have good relationships with my colleagues and the team. The one thing where I don't have a ton of control, as I mentioned is the success of my function necessarily, so I can be successful, but I don't have a lot of success over the overall company OKRs and that's kind of what I'm measured against. At the end of the day, the portfolio management does well, when a lot of our companies raise full on and I can work very hard and still not get there. Right. Yeah.

Varnavas (10:56):

Let's let's move on to the next section, which is job demand. would you say that your position entails high or low job demands? If you think of any job demands by yourself? That's great. But if you want me to help you I can not give you some examples.

Anouk (11:24):

Can you give me some examples?

Varnavas (11:26):

Yes. some examples would be for instance, time pressure, long working hours, expectations, workload, those could be some elements of a job demand and you can identify whether your job is high or low demand.

Anouk (11:47):

I think my job is high demand. And I think everyone at Antler would say that (laughs). I don't think it's specific to my role, but it's more the fact that we're an ambitious company with ambitious people, so you just kind of push yourself and push each other. So, yeah.?

Varnavas (12:12):

And if you could give me a few characteristics of a high job demand which those would be?

Anouk (12:21):

Well.... You gave me those examples! So long hours what was it? Pressure, expectations,

Varnavas (12:42):



All right. And how would you say this is affecting your well-being? A job with a high demand?

Anouk (12:52):

I think we all know what we're getting into, right? Most days it's fun. I think I'd be quite bored if.... So I have long hours, but at the same time I have flexibility in how I'm working and when, so that's okay. I think , it's fair. It's not like I'm, on a, on a supply chain or like a, an assembly line.... And it is quite fulfilling and there's growth potential. So these are all factors that make high job demand quite fulfilling still.

Varnavas (13:39):

Can I ask you, you said you have long working hours, but you also have a lot of flexibility. So would you say that those long hours are because of your time management or?

Anouk (13:55):

No. So long hours. So I don't mean that I have long hours in the sense that I work from very early to very late, but just if you add them all up. So, yeah. So for example, when I worked in the office, I had less flexibility, but I still had long working hours just because we run pretty lean. So it's just a fact.

Varnavas (14:26):

Right. All right, so let's move on to the next section, which is job control. Something you mentioned before. I think you mentioned already your level of autonomy, but if you want to elaborate a bit more `on that, and to which extent do you take decisions?

Anouk (14:52):

It depends like on what and at what level, right? To me, autonomy is not so much about who's the ultimate decision maker. We're not very hierarchical. So very often it's going to be a discussion. It's not anyone's idea that wins, but we kind of build onto each other's ideas. And yeah, I think I have pretty high degree of autonomy. To me it's more about being able to chip in and have your ideas heard...

Varnavas (15:38):

And, and that's helping your well-being, I guess?

Anouk (15:42):

Definitely.

Varnavas (15:45):

And would you say that the virtual environment impacted your decision-making? like maybe the time that you need to take decisions or the communication?

Anouk (16:02):



I don't think so, it probably would've if I'd been the only one that was remote, but as long as all of the decision meeting, everyone comes to the commonplace, which is zoom. It doesn't affect decision making that much.

Varnavas (16:24):

So you haven't seen any differences between pre COVID and with the current situation in terms of decision-making?

Anouk (16:35):

I don't think so, but again, my situation's changed a lot also prior COVID in the last year or so.

Varnavas (16:44):

Great. moving on to the last section, which is job support, I'd like to ask you, where is, your source of receiving support and what kind of support will that be?

Anouk (16:59):

Well, when I think about job's support, I think about functional support. So that would probably be from my manager, from the partners that I can reach out to. So all of these people that are kind of in my functional team, but also the more social support, which is like, just feeling like you're part of a team and that's more the Amsterdam team. So to me, that's really differentiated and for some people that's the same. But yeah, since I don't really hang out a lot with my functional support team. Yeah. That's why I differentiate from that.

Varnavas (17:50):

If I could give some synonyms to functional support, you mentioned, and social support, would that be operational and operational for functional and motivational for social? Or would you give different synonyms?

Anouk (18:14):

Well operational, yeah, definitely. And motivational or emotional. Yeah. Motivational. No, yeah, I think that's right.

Varnavas (18:27):

Yeah. would that relate to social support that you mentioned?

Anouk (18:33):

Yeah.

Varnavas (18:33):

Okay. And how, how does the supporting part to your well-being

Anouk (18:43):



Positively!

Varnavas (18:45):

would you say that it changes the way you view things, the way you handled some situations? So would you say that it changes your way of working towards some tasks?

Anouk (19:01):

Yeah, for sure. So on the motivational support, for example, it gives you a sense of purpose. It makes you feel like you really want to do the right thing. You want to make the right decision. You're not just here to sit down nine to five and get a paycheck, but you really feel ownership which is super important to me. And then the functional support is more, or the operational support is just really more part of the actual job description.

Varnavas (19:34):

Great. Thank you very much. Last question what, in your opinion is important that should be included in improving a leader's well-being. If you can think of an example that would improve a leader's well-being.

Anouk (19:56):

I think it depends where you're coming from. So I don't know.

Varnavas (20:07):

What do you mean, do you mean like a cultural thing or something?

Anouk (20:12):

Well, just your background in general. So for some people it's going to be more training on the people's skills. I just think it depends on personality on your previous experience and what you're used to and what you're missing in terms of skills. Yeah, I think that's a really tough one.

Varnavas (20:38):

If you, as Anouk would have to identify or think of something that would really improve your well-being could you think of something you are missing?

Anouk (20:53):

What would improve my well-being and my overall performance is to be able to meet, to be able to have some sort of offsite and meet all of the portfolio managers and partners, at least once. Like very practically, just to be able to build that groundwork. And I think it makes everything so much smoother.

Varnavas (21:23):



Personal connection then. And if I have to interpret it a bit differently, you would say that meeting those founders in person would be a different situation rather than the virtual connection you have at the moment.

Anouk (21:42):

Not the founders. The portfolio managers

Varnavas (21:45):

Oh portfolio managers. Right!

Anouk (21:47):

So like, those are the people that I work with day to day and I've never met them. And I think it's completely fine to work remotely. I think that works really well provided you've built some sort of relationship, even if it's just sort of meeting once it already helps tremendously to get to more buy in. The working relationship is just so much smoother after that, even if you meet just once. So I think that would help.

Varnavas (22:23):

And, in that meeting what would you let's say discuss or how would you try to connect with those people?

Anouk (22:34):

Oh, well, I think there's a ton of things that we could discuss (chuckles). But yeah, it doesn't have to be anything specific, so it doesn't have to be necessarily actual team building exercises, not at all. It could be like a training, it can be a meeting, it can be anything at all. It can be a beer. It doesn't really matter, but it allows for a bit more social context than when it's just messages on Slack and email and even a zoom call. It's not very rich.

Varnavas (23:11):

So would you say those, remember those coffee chats I had in the beginning when I entered the team, would you say something like this would help in a bigger extent? So you would find those meetings very helpful if I understood correct.

Anouk (23:31):

Yeah. I think that would be helpful. I've had these types of meetings with everyone, with all of their portfolio managers, all of the partners, but it's more powerful when it's in person and it's also more powerful if we could meet all together rather than one-on-one every time. Yeah. I think remote works well provided you have one in-person interaction.

Varnavas (24:00):

Great. Thanks. So much, would you like to add any further details to the topic we have discussed?

Anouk (24:06):



No. No. I think we we've got it covered. I'm curious to see what comes out and what your conclusions are.

Varnavas (24:13):

Thank you so much for your valuable insights. And I'd like to conclude our interview here. Thank you once again, for agreeing to help me with my thesis topic.

Anouk (24:24):

Thank you.

Interview 4

Varnavas (00:02):

All right. Thank you Anthimos (Founder & Managing Director at MindLab - a Marketing agency) for agreeing to take part in this interview. Just for the record, I have informed Anthimos that, our recording will be used for research purposes and information will be handled discreetly. So once again, thanks so much for being here. I would like to start our interview with the first question. How would you describe the remote work experience during, COVID-19 and how did your tasks differentiate or not?

Anthimos (00:43):

Well, first of all, thank you for inviting me over. It's a pleasure, always helping you and discussing with you, whatever you need. So, as I told you before starting this interview, our company was mostly working remotely for the past four and a half years. So, the COVID-19 situation actually pretty much helped us, because it showed other companies and other people that remote work can be done and it will be so much, easier for communication if people could start understanding how it works and how to do it. For us starting with remote working was a bit complicated because we are in a country, which is very small. So usually people are very eager to come and visit you. They want you to go and visit them on their premises. They want to work together because it's part of our culture to meet people in talk all the time. So it's kind of our culture working in office all together, but yeah, when we started, it was a bit of a problem, mostly explaining it to our, , customers, not to our employees. With our employees it was just a few days training on what softwares we are using, how we communicate, what they should do, how they should communicate, and then it just rolls. Yeah, sure. Some people couldn't get to it or couldn't get to it as easily as other people, but in the end, everything worked out fine.

Varnavas (03:00):

Perfect. thank you so much. Now a little bit about the well-being of the workplace. What is your perspective when you hear the term well-being at work place and how important is it to take well-being into consideration for you and the rest of the team? it's a long question. If you want me to split it up for you. So first of all, how was your perspective when you



hear the well-being at workplace and then how important it is for you and the rest of the team?

Anthimos (03:33):

So, I have to tell you, I believe that well-being in the workplace is I'll say A to Z for every business. So if your people are not feeling well in every perspective, it's not just physical health, it's mental health as well. So if they are not feeling well, their work will be a lot lower than where they can be (their capabilities). So I believe that well-being on workplace is a must. You have to create a culture, a work culture and business culture for your business, where people can feel, not just ok, HAPPY to be there. So what we've done, even though we are working remotely, we do have offices in Cyprus. So our offices are constructed in a way where it's a fun place. We have a yard full of trees. We have a playroom, we have places where people can just sit and relax and chat, or they can go out. Now we are trying to create a bar there as well. So people can go outside to the bar during their break or when they finish work. So, yeah, I believe that well-being is a total must at work. So when it comes down to personal well-being, of course you have to be at your best.....Yeah. If you are sick or if you don't feel well, or if you're stressed, all these things do matter when it gets down to work. It's not just for you... You need to make Sure that your people are well as well. So after COVID of course we want to start having some yoga sessions there as well. Uh, we do some personal development trainings for our people. Uh, we want our people to feel good and an important thing of well-being is team, team mentality in team building as well.

Varnavas (06:11):

All right, thanks so much. So you basically covered my next question as well, which was, how would you describe your overall quality of experience and functioning at work? I know you're the director manager. So, if you were just, an employee in your company, I can understand from what you referred to already, that you're, , is that you did a lot of things to increase the well-being of your employees, right?

Anthimos (06:40):

Yeah. Let me give you an example. Right now, during COVID people that come to the office, they usually don't leave at 17:30 that they have to, even if they are done with their job, they just stay there until seven or eight, sometimes till nine, they gather together there, they play games, they talk to each other. I make them some cocktails myself, and we sit there and drink and laugh. So we are just trying to create these team building mentality and the well-being of being together with your teammates. We want to create a mentality of, I wouldn't call it family, but definitely friendship between each other.

Varnavas (07:26):

Right. That's that's so, uh, amazing. And I'm actually jealous.(laughs) So now let me introduce you, to the J D C S model. The J D CS model is a model from Robert Karasek. It's one of the best known models with regard to workload and work related stress, and it has three main elements, which is the job demand, job control and job support. And I'm gonna break it downvery quickly for you just to get an idea. So the first one job demands



is, the requirements that represent the psychological stressors in the work environment. So demands, you can also refer to as the work rate, time pressure, effort, difficulty of the job, those are the job demands. Then you have the job control, which are the, your capabilities of completing a task and your authority. So how much authority you have, to complete a task and your capabilities to complete that task. And finally, the job support, which refers to the supervisor support and the support from colleagues. I would like to let me know how you would describe each of these three elements specifically to your work environment. Are they high or low?

Anthimos (09:12):

So let's get it from, what was the first one ?

Varnavas (09:16):

Job demands!

Anthimos (09:27):

When it comes down to job demands. It's definitely, as in every work, I believe that every work, if a manager is eager to promote and stand up for his company, then the demands are high are always high. You have to have high demands from your people and from yourself. So demands are high, especially on quality and, um, customer support. Those two are really high. I wouldn't say so much in deadlines and timeframes. That's something we are working on. And we are trying to create a timeframe where we can do the best job and it gets to the client on the correct time. So we don't push things too much because if you push a graphic designer, for example or an animator, if you push them too much, then they lose their creativity. But we do have high standards, on the quality of the job. So we do give them a deadline, but we do know that, okay, they can do it up to them. They, can finish the job in this timeframe. Uh, so in the next one.....

Varnavas (10:56):

So the next one is job control, which suggests the competence or capabilities, of an employee and the decision-making, authority. So to what extent they are autonomous and have the authority, finish a task by themselves.

Anthimos (11:23):

Yeah. So especially for senior employees in the company, they do have I would say a 90% authority of doing the project as they, like, that's why they are there Anyway. A graphic designer can do a design much better than I can do, a Content writer can create a content much better than I can do it. So yeah, we fully trust them on that. They do have the authority problem solving and everything they see (innovative ways) they can work with. We urge junior members to come up with ideas, we do give them the free space and time to work on problems, but of course, under higher observation. They are under more observation by the management. So we do give them the space and time to work, but we, we observe them more.



Varnavas (12:57):

Right. And the last one was support. How do you support each other and especially the senior managers or yourself . I'd like to hear your view on this as well.

Anthimos (13:36):

Well, I'm a person that asks a lot. Whenever I have a problem that I haven't seen before, and I don't know how to solve it, I just go out there, find people that are older than me or older in business, or they have more experience, and I just ask them, you know what? I got this problem. I don't know how to fix it. What do I do? Or I just read. So I get experienced from there as well.

Varnavas (14:06):

So, if I rephrase that a little bit is getting the experience from other people that have been in the sector already that you trust of course, and also reading. Is That correct?

Anthimos (14:24):

Yeah.

Varnavas (14:25):

So, yeah, because that was something that it was really interesting to me because if an employee needs support then the first thing they will do is to go to their supervisor. But what if it's the last person on the pyramid ?

Anthimos (14:49):

Usually managers they read a lot to become a manager. You have to understand that, "I don't know everything. so I'm going to have a lot of questions. I'm going to meet a lot of problems and you have to be open to that" And you have to be open into asking other people for advice. You should not be forgetting that no one can work on your problems. But everything you faced, everything I faced, I'm pretty someone else has faced it as well. So I just have to find that person to give me the solution he has. That's actually pretty easy. If you think about it, it's pretty easy. You just have to find those people.

Varnavas (15:37):

Right. I'm going to take you back a bit again, regarding the job demand, . How do you experience long working hours? I know that in a lot of cases now with remote working, working hours can be extended. So how do you deal with that?

Anthimos (16:07):

How I do it myself or how the people in my company do it?

Varnavas (16:13):

If you could give me both cases that would be great.



Anthimos (16:18):

I call myself a workaholic. So I'm a person that usually wakes up at 5:40 and starts working half an hour after. And I, sometimes I had days that I was working until two or 3:00 AM in the next morning. So yeah, but I enjoy it. That's something I like, and that's why I'm doing it. It's not just because it's my company and I want to see it growing. Uh, I enjoy working. I love it. I love it. So for other people, I have to tell you, if they like what they are doing they can spend 10 or 11 hours in the company. This is an example from my employees. And I was like, guys, come on, get out of here. Just close it. You can do it tomorrow. And there were like... Why? Why do it tomorrow? I can do it now. I'm all right with it. Don't worry. So of course there are people that they don't want to give a minute extra, so they will try and push their time and push their work into the eight hours so they can finish there. But there are still people that love their job. When you have the mentality in the company as well... And the first priority of the employees is the satisfaction of the clients then they will give the extra hours. Um, of course, sometimes it's, needed for projects you don't like. So if it's something you don't like, and you have to push it, finish it, it's stressful and a bit I don't know how to, how to express it, but yeah, it's stressful, but it's a job that has to be done. If you have a deadline and you have to give it tomorrow morning, you cannot push it any further. So yeah, sometimes it does happen. It's not so good, but we have to experience that as well. But yeah, as I told you, if you like your job, if you love the job, if you love the company, if you want to help your clients, that's the point helping your clients, then you put in the extra hours and those extra hours, they will come back to you. For sure.

Varnavas (18:35):

How did the environment impacted your decision making? You told me that it's a setup that you've been using quite for longtime now, but do you see any differences in the decision-making between the virtual and the normal setup?

Anthimos (19:04):

When you say decision making, you're talking about clients or our company?

Varnavas (19:12):

The company in general.

Anthimos (19:28):

No I wouldn't say that something has changed regarding that one. I wouldn't say that. Of course we've been working like that since the beginning. So it's nothing changed for us. This was the way we are used to work. This was the way we started working in Mind-lab. So decision-making, it's actually pretty easy. You just have a zoom meeting, you get people together.(laughs) But no, nothing changed.

Varnavas (20:09):



Okay. And the way you're dealing with your clients? I assume in the beginning, you were like, face-to-face with your clients. Now you had to, create virtual meetings or? is that the case ?

Anthimos (20:30):

We do more, much more virtual meetings than before. Even though we used to work remotely, it used to be a remote team, and we let our clients know that, "you know what, we are a remote team." They usually wanted us to visit them physically, but now virtual meetings are much more in the picture. And it's much more acceptable than they were once.

Varnavas (21:07):

Right. And did you face any difficulties dealing with those clients? Did you see any resistance from them?

Anthimos (21:16):

Yeah, at the beginning, I have to say that, yes, they did resist on the virtual meetings. There were like "Ughhh zoom. Why do you do it on zoom? Come over here, let's have a coffee." So, yeah as I told you,

part of our culture. We want to meet people. We want to handshake to see the other person in person. So it was a bit difficult in the beginning, but now I would say it's much easier, not the easiest part of the job, but it's much easier than the beginning.

Varnavas (21:53):

All right. And last question.yeah, sorry for this back and forth again, but I just saw this question now. you've told me before that you receive support-since you don't have somebody on a higher level- from books and other people that have been in the sector, how does that feel? How, does this impact your well-being? Do you think not having somebody directly connected to the company impacts your well-being or,how do you experience that?

Anthimos (22:35):

I'm not really sure I got your question to be honest.

Varnavas (22:38):

Alright. Let me clarify. Let's say your employees have something that bothers them, right? You would want them to come to you and express this, right? If they feel stressed or if they don't like something about the company or whatever.... If you, yourself, you feel stressed, let's say, or you're dealing with a problem that you don't know what to do. Don't you feel the need of expressing it to somebody within the team? Since you don't have anybody,, inferior to you....

Anthimos (23:20):



Within the team?? Um, no, no. Within the team no, because, I'm of the idea that they have to have someone to look up to. So if they see you stressed or out of control, I believe that will lose you credibility. I'm not saying that leaders are freaking robots of course you have to express yourself, but don't show that you are stressed. They can be stressed a leader can't!! You can be stressed when you meet your mentor or someone that is helping you out. Most people can see you like that, but not your employees. If they see your stress then they're gone. if they feel that, "Oh my God, something is wrong. You're losing their focus. They will lose control. They will get more stressed and their work will go down dramatically.

Varnavas (24:37):

Right. So it does quite impacted your well-being a bit?

Anthimos (24:49):

Yeah, I believe, yeah. I believe, yeah. Check out every entrepreneur, you know, you will see that the, they look older than they are. Usually they will look like me. (laughs) It is really stressful. When you have a problem and you don't know how to fix it until you find the answer, because that's something you either have to find it by yourself, by books or studying or something like that, or with a mentor until you find that answer it's freaking stressful. So yes. When you check out entrepreneurs you'll, see it as well, most entrepreneurs look older than they are.

Varnavas (25:31):

(Laughs) I will keep an eye for that! Would you like to add any further details to the topic we have discussed?

Anthimos (25:42):

Man!! Um, I don't know if you're thinking of becoming an entrepreneur good luck with that!! (laughs)

Varnavas (25:51):

(laughs) Thank you so much for all the valuable insights. I really enjoyed it. And, uh, yeah. Thanks again for your valuable intervention.

Anthimos (26:03):

Thank you, man. Thank you for your time. And I hope it will be helpful for you as well.

Interview 5

Varnavas (00:03):

Thanks for accepting having this interview with me just for the record, I have informed George that our recording will only be used for research purposes and all the information will be handled discreetly. Hi, George, how are you?



George (00:24):

Hello? I'm good.

Varnavas (00:28):

Thanks once again for being here. I'd like to start this interview by asking you to explain to me a bit about your current position, capacity of the team, et cetera.

George (00:43):

Yes. So currently I'm working in a startup. We are basically organizing virtual cooking events and experiences for corporate and consumers. We are based in Luxembourg. Our main market is the UK, Luxembourg and Germany, and we have some clients in the US. I am in the account management and business development aspect for the time being. In terms of structure, we have a total of 17 to 18 employees either in the form of freelancers, outsourced people that they are students or virtual event producers like assistants, tech support, or account managers in some sort of form or the other. The CEO also acts as the CTO and then we have an events manager and the VP of operations, which I report to.

Varnavas (01:58):

All right, thanks so much. How would you describe the remote work experience during COVID-19?

George (02:05):

I mean, so far it has been challenging to some extent, because although our structure is set to be virtual for us as a tech company, it's a bit of a hassle to get everyone on board on the same page. To ensure that they get everything, that you are aligned with them, that the quality of their work is not subpar, to make sure that they follow up on the deadlines. Maybe the motivation also might be low. There are numerous things to consider. I think in the beginning it was more difficult than it is now because after one year we got the sense or the hang of it, there is some sort of more structure, more practices to follow. And actually for us actually Covid, it was a good aspect from the topic that we are doing a lot of virtual event team building activities. So it actually helped us to see how we can help companies to better motivate and engage their employees to get to know each other at a more interpersonal level.

Varnavas (03:28):

All right. Thank you. Did your tasks or a day-to-day job, differentiated in any sort of way?

George (03:36):

Yes. I mean, okay. Although it's predominantly on the business development, because the central team, it's like only six or seven people in total, you know, you have the two executive roles of leadership, then you have the events managers and then it's me and my colleague, we are, more in some sort of a support role for the executives, but also we have to ensure that everything else runs smoothly on the day-to-day operation, either with contact facing clients, either with resolving issues on the back end of the operation, or



figuring out how to develop new processes and the tools that we need to do to the extent that we can scale up the business along the way.

Varnavas (04:26):

And would you say that COVID 19 changed these procedures?

George (04:39):

I mean, the company started scaling up, recently, like for like six months ago, it started slightly before COVID, but COVID kind of accelerated that growth. So the processes are being set up, but it definitely changed the way that we were supposed to do business and how we would market ourselves to the public. Plus, it opened our Leading product category, the B2B segment, like it, it boosted it a lot. So the emphasis, switched from being a, B2C site or platform to a B2B

Varnavas (05:22):

All right. Would you say this situation affected your leadership style and skills?

George (05:30):

To some extent you get a hang of different perspectives either by talking to the managers or the leaders of the departments that we have contacted to develop the events with them. So you kind of see the different styles and what they have to face. Now had to become more interpersonal, because back in the day you would go in the office, you would know the people. Now, you might be in a meeting and you might see someones children that running in, you know? Or you meet some, some of their family members while at a call. So again, it changes the perspective of how we see and we treat people. It's becoming slightly more human in some organizations, some others they remained the same. Inside the organization now in terms of leadership, I mean, okay, coming from hospitality or hotel operations it's a specific set of roles and style more military, you still have to acknowledge the people and everything, but you are there all the time and you have to coordinate that. Now it's, it's still that time management and everything, but you also need to consider how everything is in people's life, because they are in their house working as opposed to an office setup. So there is this big contradiction of forces that they just clash in terms of motivation jobs, and tasks, performance etc.

Varnavas (07:20):

Very well. Thank you very much. Let me you ask you about well-being at workplace. How would you define well-being at a workplace?

George (07:33):

Well, psychological for first of all because if you don't feel well or if you feel, unrest will decrease your productivity eventually, I mean, okay, we are still trying to manage that along the way. But what we've been doing is to celebrating more achievement, smaller achievements, or wins. So at least people get excited so that they can see the end result, you know, maybe throw a social drink or party every now and then even at least



electronically or get lunch together. The people that we have here in Luxembourg,, or in the nearby area all together to meet each other and socialize. I mean, it's more about team building and team spirit in the end. I mean, yeah. I don't know really. It's a big topic. Let me think. For example with some of the VPs, that they are younger. we organised and went for football once or some other stuff. So that, you know, even if you're outside of work, at least we get to exercise a bit or we get them to engage. Like, that's it, we haven't done much. Maybe there is much more to be done potentially, but you know, you have to do what you have to do within specific budget and the limitations that you have from the government.

Varnavas (09:21):

Perfect. So if I could summarize it a bit I would say that well-being at workplace for you is more the social aspects outside of the working hours maybe?

George (09:35):

Also the moral, the social aspect, but also the moral and the motivation of the team. Because if they are not satisfied or if they don't come together, you know, when you might have the clashes which for sure they will exist at some point or another, so, you know that's a problem we have to face.

Varnavas (10:00):

Do you think well-being amongst leaders or employees is affected by working virtually? And if so, in what way?

George (10:09):

Yes. I believe that it is. Maybe there miscommunication , because you are not there face to face. Now with the virtual environment that you chat a lot so many messages might be interpreted differently. You might be misunderstood in one way or another. It's not the same way, as in having human contact, you know?

Varnavas (10:58):

Do you think there is a differentiation between creating well-being for leaders and well-being for employees?

George (11:12):

Yes and no, because in the end, an employee will be only as motivated as you allow them to be on the other hand, a leader needs to have a good team to support him/her and to support them at the same time. So it's a bit of an interconnected chain of events and different links and parameters to take into consideration. I mean, you know, of course, like you have to see the company culture and what the leadership means for everyone. It's such a broad concept that it depends on the person. Some people might tell you, yes. Some no, personally I stand in the middle like that. Everything is interconnected.

Varnavas (12:16):



Very interesting answer indeed. Why do you think taking well-being in the workplace into consideration important? How does it influence the workplace?

George (12:33):

Firstly we need to consider, why do we work? Why do people work? Okay. And they work to be able to afford to live in a place. They work to be able to produce in society. They work because they might like a specific job or industry that they are in, or just to make end meets. If an employee is not feeling well then a series of health related issues might unravel as time progresses like depression or burnout. Well-being is important to the extent that you have to keep them happy to make sure that they are okay, that their personal life it's fine. If you can support them somehow you have to figure a what, a way, how to do so, so that they can also be at their best, not only in their personal life, but also in their professional life, because professional and social, although some people might be able to separate them in reality they are interconnected. If something happened at home, you're not going to be able to work or perform because you will be thinking of that. And vice versa. If something went bad at work, you will also take it at home.

Varnavas (14:07):

Understood. How would you describe your overall quality of experience and functioning?

George (14:16):

Could you repeat the question? Yeah.

Varnavas (14:18):

Yes, of course. How would you as George describe your overall quality of experience and function at work?

George (14:28):

What do you mean?

Varnavas (14:35):

Basically in simple words, how satisfied are you with the current job you're having? When it comes to well-being.

George (14:47):

when it comes to well-being I am super happy. The job itself it is demanding, but it always is when it's the beginning. Especially in startups. If you want to build up something and make it successful, there is a lot of pain, a lot of long hours, that they go into it. You can't just have that nine to five mentality. So obviously some days it's like a roller coaster. Some days you just feel unproductive. But, you know, it's also sometimes the money that might motivate some people, et cetera, et cetera. I would say it a variety of things.

Varnavas (15:43):



I'm happy you brought the job demands into the scenery because that's the next section of this interview. So it has to do with the job demands. Would you say that then you, you already mentioned that your position entails high job demands. do you want to elaborate on that?

George (16:24):

I can give you a couple of aspects. I mean, predominantly I'm developing the tools and the support systems and part of the processes with our business process engineer in order to provide the account managers and the business developers that we will be onboarding soon, with the necessary capabilities to better engage with the clients, to understand our pricing structures, policies, for the executive management, to understand their price points....

Varnavas (17:08):

I need to stop you here Because I think I need to clarify a bit more. I'm not asking you for the job responsibilities. I'm asking about the job demands. If I could give you some examples, those could be time pressure, long working hours, expectations, workload.

George (17:36):

I mean, in terms of workload it has the ups and downs. In terms of proposals reaching out or acquiring customers there can be days that we're running like crazy and some days that they are more quiet. In terms of expectations, we are expected that everyone performs to the best of their abilities. Of course we are all trying to figure it out along the way for some aspects. after Covid the status quo in business has changed and different opportunities have arose. Also when the company started, it was less competition, but as time progressed, now there are more companies or startups, or even private chefs that they develop a website and they go out to sell their products. So in order for that, now we are expected to be even more agile. It's our job to communicate clearly to the outside world, how we are different and how we do it better. We work with professional chefs that they have certain years of experience that we are providing assistance, et cetera, et cetera.

Varnavas (19:21):

All right. So just to summarize, would you say that your current job is a high demand or low demand?

George (19:36):

Medium to high perhaps.

Varnavas (19:37):

And what are some of the three, let's say major characteristics of a medium to high job demand?

George (19:59):



It's mostly the pressure to make sure that we stay afloat. It's the responsibility of being ambassadors and making sure that everything runs smooth as near perfect. And it's trying to engage with everyone and make sure that the communication flows clearly.

Varnavas (20:34):

Perfect. Thank you very much. Would you say that this medium to high job demand affects your well-being?

George (20:46):

To some extent yes because there is more stress than a low job demand.

Varnavas (20:52):

More stress you said? Anything else that you might think of?

George (20:59):

No. That's it. Just sometimes the stress or the anxiousness or the uncertainty of going somewhere of what's going to be the end result because you can't really forecast it.

Varnavas (21:12):

Great. Thank you very much. Let's move on to the next section, which is job control. I would like to ask you, in which ways do you feel autonomous?

George (21:23):

Autonomous, like on a personal level?

Varnavas (21:29):

no while at work.

George (21:33):

I mean in my work, we have like a lot of autonomy because everyone is busy doing what needs to be done but also we have that macromanagement that they will check out on us or that we will check out on the others to see if they need some help or try to communicate with everyone to make sure that everything is put together because a lot of projects, they might have interdependencies on available data or on the works of others, et cetera, et cetera.

Varnavas (22:25):

And to which extent do you take decisions?

George (22:31):

From a scale of one to 10, I would say five to six, depending on the nature of the project or the topic of the project. So if we are dealing with technology then I don't take any serious decisions because it's not my field. I will be given the problem and I'm supposed to come up



with proposals or what tools to recommend that we might take onboard. But the end decision, it will be taken from the CEO who is also the CTO of the company. But if I'm doing a project for the account management team that I brought up and then I will be training them in order to configure something then the autonomy is way higher because I'm the one that running this project, it's me, that is putting it on the line and I'm supposed to bring it onboard.

Varnavas (23:49):

Great. Thank you very much. Would you say that the virtual environment impacted your decision-making

George (23:58):

To some extent yes but as we are getting older, your mentality changes or how you see things. It definitely changed in a couple of different ways because you realize some things. You are engaging in a different setting and it's that novel experience. Whether you are rational or irrational, it's also personal characteristics. So to that extent, I might have become a bit more conscious or more considerate of some factors as opposed to a couple of years ago.

Varnavas (24:45):

Thanks a lot. Moving on to the last section. This is about job support, both operational and motivational within a job setting. I'd like to ask you, where is the source of receiving support and what kind of support,

George (25:06):

What do you mean? Can you clarify that?

Varnavas (25:10):

Yes. In a work setting, right? I mentioned both operational and motivational support. Where is the source of yourself receiving support from others? From which people let's say.

George (25:32):

Well, by asking questions to other people, engaging in a conversation, asking the right questions at the right time, so that you know, that they are not super busy or drowning in something super important, and then you also push them as well by adding that extra pressure, making sure that everything gets clear, it's well communicated. And by actually socializing, I believe the socializing aspect it's great for morale. if other people they are willing to work towards that goal.

Varnavas (26:20):

So you partially mentioned motivational support with morale if I understood that correctly.

George (26:27):



Exactly.

Varnavas (26:29):

And about the operational support you said referring to others, would that be co-employees or managers or both?

George (26:41):

Both. Look we are a flat organization. It's a flat hierarchy. Even the CEO a lot of times he will ask us our opinions and we will debate with him on some aspects.

Varnavas (27:54):

And when you mentioned morale before for the motivational support, do you only refer to colleagues or?

George (28:22):

Everyone makes something to entertain the team every now and then. To make it a bit more fun or to make it more interpersonal. Just checking on them, how everyone is doing these things. These are small things that they will influence how people act, how they behave towards you and how well they are doing at the end of the day. Like we even have the Friday operations meetings where we check on everyone, like those wins to celebrate, to give them kudos or to give feedback.

Varnavas (29:09):

And how would you say, does this support, you just mentioned impacts your well-being.

George (29:19):

Sometimes you can blow off some steam, you know, if something is blocking you or by mentioning it, like at least we can take necessary actions or you can celebrate a small or a big win. and then of course empathy

Varnavas (29:55):

What about empathy?

George (29:59):

Showing empathy to your peers and colleagues. Like the more empathetic you are the more the support systems and your end leaders can function better with their employees and vice versa, like how considerate you are in everything.

Varnavas (30:17):

Great. What, in your opinion is important to be included in improving a leader's well-being?

George (30:39):



Sometimes the acknowledgement that they are trying to do their best under scrutinizing circumstances that they might have budget limitations. They have to make sure that everyone's on the payroll. If they are an entrepreneur, for example, gets paid. Those are the things that they are there, they exist, but they don't get acknowledged very often than not. It's that sense of responsibility that you have take. It's a very big leap. And then also as a leader within an organization, you are always there, your supervisors or your coleaders, they have to act as a mentor for you, but then you also have to act as a mentor for your associates that you are supposed to lead or supervise . if you're stuck somewhere in the middle, you have the pressure from top and from below that it's not always acknowledged. I think that's the biggest thing that it's not acknowledged a lot of times and it can cause a lot of pressure or stress to someone.

Varnavas (32:17):

So if I could summarize that something very important in your opinion, that should be included to improve a leader's well-being is acknowledgement and mentorship, if I understood correctly?

George (32:33):

Yes. and empathy. I think empathy can go a long way with leadership, most modern leaders, they acknowledge that, but depending on the sector, it's more acknowledged than not. It depends.

Varnavas (32:57):

Would you like to add any further details to the topic we have discussed?

George (33:04):

No. I don't know if you have any more discussion points, but from my side, I think those are my experiences so far and my perspective.

Varnavas (33:16):

Thanks so much. And I need to I'm gonna conclude the interview here. Thank you very much for all your valuable insights. And once again thanks a lot for agreeing, helping me with my thesis.

Interview 6

Varnavas Sisou 0:03

Good afternoon, Saskia. Thank you so much for agreeing to having this interview with me. For the record, I have informed Saskia therecording will only be used for research purposes and all the information will be handled discreetly. Saskia, I'd like to start this interview by asking you to explain me your current position. And what are you doing within the company?



Saskia 0:32

Yeah. Okay. Um, so I work at Antler as a director of founder recruitment. And what that means basically, at Antler we find exceptional founders that we support in building their business and my role, I'm responsible for overseeing the finding of those founders, across our six locations in Europe. So defining the strategy, but also looking at the data of former founders and seeing which ones were successful. How can we find more of those? Which ones were unsuccessful? And how can we find less of those? So actively looking at Founder recruitment. And besides that, I'm also responsible for the internal recruitment at Antler. And a part of that is also people on culture, within organisational structure and teams. And also for supporting our portfolio teams with their recruitment for their companies.

Varnavas Sisou 1:36

Perfect. And I would assume that you're working in a remote setting, but you used to work before in a remote work with the founders, but with the rest of the colleagues of Antler you used to work at the office. So I'd like to ask you, how would you describe the remote work experience during COVID-19?

Saskia 2:07

I would say that, with modern day technology and kind of the right flexibility given by leadership, it is fairly doable to work from home. However, it's sometimes hard to stay motivated or to keep the engagement especially from team members to still feel connected sometimes to the broader mission and tasks.

Varnavas Sisou 2:36

Did your tasks or day to day job differentiate in any sort of way?

Saskia 2:45

Well, the recruitment of our founders was done mostly virtually anyways, like we do mostly over video calls our selection process. However, during the programme there were definitely some differences than before in the way that we interact with people. Also a lot of big source of hires for us was doing events. And this has completely changed by having to move that all online, online events just don't get the same vibe. or traction, like, offline events. That definitely changed.

Varnavas Sisou 3:21

And how did this affect you? would you say that this affected your leadership style or skills?

Saskia 3:33

Um, yes, I think I'm someone that is quite a people's person. And I love to motivate others in my team by organising social events but also by building a personal relationship. And in this last year, for sure, it's been way harder to do that remotely. And to feel that connection with my team and with others around me, so definitely has impacted me I think what what I tried to do, then, nevertheless, is even whether it's online, still have social drinks where you don't talk about work and where you have a virtual lunch and just try to still keep keep to keep those moments in the agenda.



Varnavas Sisou 4:24

So you would say that this situation impacted you negatively, if I understand correctly, but are there any skills that you developed?

Saskia 4:39

yeah, I think negatively but also perhaps positively. I guess it makes it easier to work as a global organisation to improve communication also with other locations and whether that's Sydney or New York or Singapore, where That maybe felt a little bit far away. Now, it's just as close as Oslo or London. And I think it also the flexibility of work has given me a lot because now I can divide my own time and go to the gym after lunch or whatever. And I think I feel that I also benefit from that by having the opportunity to balance my own work and life more. So I wouldn't want to go back now to five times a week to the office.

Varnavas Sisou 5:35

All right. Thank you very much. Moving to the next section, which is well-being at workplace. How would you define well being at workplace what Saskia's definition of well being at workplace?

Saskia 5:57

I think there's a there's a physical and a more psychological part of that definition. I think physically, it's about having a nice workspace, having facilities like perhaps we have in this office, a gym, where you have fresh fruits, we have a coffee bar that is good having ergonomic working equipment, etc. I think psychologically, it's more having a safe space feeling that your voice is heard. And I think that part of employee well being is very important, and sometimes overlooked. But yeah, feeling that you feel trusted that you are having fun that you can laugh!

Varnavas Sisou 6:55

Yeah. You mentioned employee well being! Do you think there is a differentiation between creating well-being for leaders and well-being for employees?

Saskia 7:13

Well, not so much. I think big leaders always are thinking about the well being of their employees, but they just as much need to have some time and space to be able to ventilate as well. It can be quite Lonely not to be able to share maybe your frustrations or thoughts or always have to be kind to others or consider it and I think that's something that counts for both leaders and employees.

Varnavas Sisou 7:43

So would you say that leaders are responsible for employees Well being?

Saskia 7:51

Yeah, for sure. They are but also someone has to look after the leader's well being as well.

Varnavas Sisou 8:01



And who do you think that would be?

Saskia 8:10

That should be maybe an advisory board or whatever sits on top of that. And if that's not there, then maybe an HR department a neutral person in the organisation could take on that.

Varnavas Sisou 8:28

Thank you very much. Do you think well being amongst leaders or employees is affected by working virtually?

Saskia 8:39

Yes. I think, it's harder to connect. So you definitely affect well being but also, I think both positively and negatively. I think it also gives you a lot of opportunity to be more at home to be more with kids, relatives and maybe, go outside, go to the gym, but it can also be very daunting if you have to be at home with kids and balance that with your work or there's trouble in the relationship. It can be very stressful to have to work from home and besides that if you have a new joiner, like how do you build up that relationship with the rest of your team? If you have someone leaving? Yeah, it's quite difficult to ensure well being and also physically like I even had this this problem where I got really bad pains from from working at home because I don't have a setup at home I just hunched over my laptop and can't handle it. So I bought a standing desk in the end, but not all employers are super considerate of that for their employees.

Varnavas Sisou 9:53

yeah you're kind of leading me to the next question, which is how would you Describe your well being at the workplace at this moment?

Saskia 10:10

Yeah, pretty good I think. Yeah, well being is of course also How much are you rewarded or respected or appreciated, I guess for your work. And, I think also how much stress do you have? So I think the work demands right now are fairly balanced, I think I have also gained enough experience to know what I can handle and what not. I think I have a good enough relationship with my colleagues to be able to also push back if things don't work out or to take on extra work. I like working with my colleagues that helps. And I like the flexibility to go to the office when it's possible to go. So I would rate it maybe seven or eight out of 10. But there are also definitely days where I think I don't feel motivated. And I am wondering are we ever, you know, going to come out of this? I think what affects my well being negatively also is just how is the overall performance of the company? Are we doing well? Are we doing not? factors that I may not be able to influence? It can negatively impact my well being

Varnavas Sisou 11:44

Is that the reason why you didn't score fully on the well being? Is it because there are things you cannot control? Or are there some things that if you had them, you would score higher?

Saskia 12:00



Yeah, I think also, it would be nice to have a bigger team to see more people. I think there would be other factors that and again not everything is in my control, because I don't think I can just hire now a team for myself. I think the work we do at Antler is also quite cyclical. Sometimes you have the program, and a lot things happening. Sometimes it's just a bit of a slow period. And right we're in a bit of a slower period, I would say.

Varnavas Sisou 12:45

Do you do you like those ups and downs? Which case would you prefer more?

Saskia 12:54

I definitely prefer more the ups. Let's say when there's a lot of classes in their program, and there's a lot of things happening. Because, yeah, the new experiences, new people, I get energy out of that because I am extrovert and I also think it's healthy. Of course not to have 100% pressure every month because we would all go crazy. So it's fine that it is cyclical.

Varnavas Sisou 13:22

Yeah, next section. And again, you refered to it a bit. It's about job demands. Would you say that your position entails high or low job demands? And why?

Saskia 13:44

Yeah, I think job demand is two factors. There's one is like, how much do you actually how many tasks Do you maybe have to complete? But then also, it's like, what responsibility level do you have? Sometimes you are not completely in control, of the execution because you have to leave others to work on execution, and you're responsible for the end result. And I'm working as a European director on a number of projects where I work together with a lot of different stakeholders. And together we are responsible for the end result. Whereas in Amsterdam itself, I'm also responsible for day to day recruitment, which is a lot of work, but it's also very results oriented task, results are quite clear. So I would say the job demand is quite high, but it's not very stressful. Because I also do feel that my role is not impacting, let's say, the make or break directly of the of the company. As in I'm in there indirectly, yes, it's important, but I'm not making life or death decisions, thankfully(laughs). Yeah, I don't know. It's not giving me stress, thankfully. But I think the expectations quite high. And also this comes in peaks where sometimes you work towards a deadline, and then demands are super high, you have to really finish something. And sometimes the pace is a bit slower. Sorry, it's a bit of a vague answer.

Varnavas Sisou 15:51

no!! could you just summarise two or three characteristics of a high job demand, because I think you mentioned it's a high demand and I know you mentioned expectations already. Which is really nice.

Saskia 16:08

Yeah, I would say it's high job demand, because there are a lot of different stakeholders that I have to work with, all sort of different timelines and expectations, and I have also a lot of day to day routine tasks, but also like longer term projects that are requiring quite a lot of input. And, ultimately, founder recruitment is the basis of what Antler does, I would



say, like, this is definitely an important part of the organisation. But it is not getting me stressed.

Varnavas Sisou 16:55

you mentioned expectations, which is on my list, you will you mentioned the workload. You mentioned time. What about working hours?

Saskia 17:10

working hours, yeah, quite manageable. I'd say I can keep myself to nine to five, but I'm also really flexible working hours sometimes. I work in evening, sometimes I skip a morning.

Varnavas Sisou 17:24

Great. Thanks a lot. Moving on to the next section, which is about job control. In which ways do you feel autonomous? And which extent do you take decisions?

Saskia 17:41

Yeah, I feel very autonomous in decision making in Antler. I feel that we have a culture in which it is very much appreciated, where you take decisions and also take initiatives and I have not ever experienced being sort of negatively harassed because of taking a decision or taking an initiative. So I think that there's a lot of autonomy. Of course, there are some checks and balance, I usually like to discuss whatever decisions I'm making with a partner, but I never feel that there's a hierarchy as such.

Varnavas Sisou 18:25

And would you say that, this helps your well being and if there is a change with the virtual environment now?

Saskia 18:40

Yes, it definitely helped me gain confidence and autonomy and it is fantastic, because that gives you room for creativity and freedom of thought. And so yes, it helps me and feeling better. But in the virtual world, it is sometimes more difficult also to get everybody around the table, it's sometimes more difficult to check in if you're working from home, and then get someone's approval. So you sometimes just have to allow for more autonomy to not slow down the business. And I think that Antler is doing a great job in that respect. But also just being available online is very important, I always tried to be very responsive, communicative, having the right communication systems in place as an employer is super important to keep that communication going and then to allow for people to take decisions quickly.

Varnavas Sisou 19:45

So the availability online helps the decision making you think?

Saskia 19:57

Well, it sometimes slows it down because you're not in a position to reach someone if the person is not responsive, it slows it down. If you are all very used to working online, then



it can also speed things up. But it only works if you have a very good online communication tools in place.

Varnavas Sisou 20:27

Perfect. Thank you very much. final section, which is job support. I'd like to ask you, where is Saskia as a source of receiving support? And what kind of support that will be?

Saskia 20:50

yeah, I think I get support from management. I report to both departments here and then to the global team in Singapore and they're definitely also very supportive of my development and growth, but also they are there to take away any hurdles or challenges. So that's a big level of support, but also support from whatever trainings and systems and tools that we use in the organisation. And then I feel strong about having sort of a support network in the team and sort of more informal relationships with colleagues and having just fun activities, those kinds of things have really helped me. so different types of support, I would say.

Varnavas Sisou 21:55

So, if I understood correctly, and if I could summarise it, you mentioned trainings and colleagues, and managers for the operational support. And also, you mentioned some fun activities with colleagues. Would that be motivational support?

Saskia 22:20

Yeah, I would say, that is motivational support

Varnavas Sisou 22:24

Alright, are there any other people apart from colleagues, you reach out for motivational support?

Saskia 22:33

Um,

Varnavas Sisou 22:37

well, when when it has to do with the workplace, of course, for instance, if you're feeling not so motivated, for work are there other people who you're reaching out to? Or do you keep it within the workplace?

Saskia 23:01

Yeah, of course, there's, like, family and friends and partner and stuff. If it's outside of work, you can always find support in your significant other, and especially sometimes it's very nice to blow off steam, but it's also nice if someone understands who you're talking about. So what I do also have quite a close relationship with the other peers in other locations that are not necessarily on your day to day job. And I love just also listening to their stories and sharing my own experiences. And we can always laugh a bit about similar situations that happen all around.



Varnavas Sisou 23:53

So if I understand correctly, that support boosts your well being. Thank you. Last question. What would you think it's really important that should be included for improving a leaders well being?

Saskia 24:25

I think that one thing I would mention actually upfront without support, I'd say a lot of people get promoted at some point into leadership roles without ever being given training, or the only reference you have is the managers you've had in the past, whether you liked or whether you did not like their management style. So I think it would be very important if we would have some sort of more guidance on how do you manage others what different leadership styles suit you? What works for you? How do you communicate as a leader, how do you indeed work remotely or not? And how do you lead meetings effectively. I think there are a lot of trainings that you just learn on the job. And it's kind of assumed you're either good at it or not. But having a more formal training, that could be something I would see as useful. And then also, always having the opportunity to be able to have some sort of trust person where you can go to and that cares about your well being. it's nice to have some sort of support system around you, in terms of your managers or neutral HR people that just check on you.

Varnavas Sisou 25:58

So you mentioned trust, which is very important and training. Right. These are two elements would really improve a leader as well being. even in the virtual environment?

Saskia 26:12

Absolutely.

Varnavas Sisou 26:14

Perfect. Thank you very much Saskia. That was the end of my interview, I'd like to ask if there are any further details you would like to add to the topic we have discussed?

Saskia 26:27

Not really, we're perfectly on time. And sorry for the bit vague answers. But if you need any clarification later on I would be happy to help.

Varnavas Sisou 26:35

No, no, definitely it was very insightful. Thank you once again for taking the time to do this interview with me. I would like to conclude our interview now and I'm going to stop the recording.

Interview 7

Varnavas Sisou 0:00

Perfect. All right, Tudor, thank you so much for agreeing helping me with my thesis topic. Thank you so much for accepting this invitation. I would like to start this interview by



asking you to tell me a little bit about your current position and capacity of the team and the company in general.

Tudor 0:24

Yeah, sure. My name is Tudor I'm one of the co founders and the CEO of SpeechifAI. I oversee and inspire the work that our team is doing. We are a team of 9 soon to be 10 in four different time zones, two continents and many cities. We do all of our work remotely and it was by design like that even before COVID.

Varnavas Sisou 1:02

Right? And how do you experience this remote work setup?

Tudor 1:13

When we started, we had to make a decision about a couple of things. One of them were a bunch of Europeans who wanted to do a company in the US and wanted to target primary US customers. We don't have resident visas in the US, we didn't know from the very beginning that a significant part of our work will have to be done online. And we're also thinking, What's the best way for us to attract the best talent wherever those people can be. For that, we settled for the remote experience even before COVID struck. So like when COVID happened, it didn't really change much in the way we were operating anyway.

Varnavas Sisou 2:03

Alright, so is that the way you've always been working? Always virtually or before in your career have you had positions where you were going to the office?

Tudor 2:21

that's a great question. In the first startup that I co founded GovFaces. We were also remote working. This was 2014 2015. At that time, we had built this community of volunteers and interns who were helping us there were 70 of them across Europe. So in 2014 2015, I would even have seven to nine Skype calls a day. For me at least this isn't new.

Varnavas Sisou 2:54

And so you, you're used to that. But if you have to compare being at the office? or do you not have such an experience at all?

Tudor 3:07

I have it but very basic. I'm an outlier here in the sense that I haven't had that much of professional experience in a structured setting. I worked at the United Nations for a few months like that, I absolutely hated it. And I also had some experience as a teaching and research assistant at my university where we were actually face to face. it was very limited compared to many other people who actually worked in an office.

Varnavas Sisou 3:45

Perfect, thank you very much. I would like to ask you, how is this virtual environment affecting you? And what are the main differences between working remotely and working on site?



Tudor 4:02

I think it's easier. For us and for the kind of business we have, it's actually much easier. Because before the pandemic, when I would have to go to meetings, I would actually have to travel to that city to meet people in person and the commute and the time spent preparing for meetings and travelling would actually take most of my time. I give you an example yesterday I had 9 meetings. I don't think that could have been possible before.

Varnavas Sisou 4:55

Makes sense. How is this affecting you? Would you say, it is enhancing your leadership style or skills while working virtually.

Tudor 5:08

So I mean, there's advantages and disadvantages, I definitely feel that in order to build a strong team and a strong culture, you do need to have face time with people. Because people get their positive energy by being surrounded with other people. It's just human nature, right? That's, the toughest side of it. But at the same time, I'll give you an example, we're planning to do an off site session where we bring everyone together in one place, actually we think of Athens for that sometime at the beginning of this year. But because everyone went into lockdown and there's all of these challenges associated with people travelling, we realise that the advantages of meeting together were not as significant as all of the risks, and then the mental health burden of people travelling from various places to meet together in one place, and then going back to their families. So I do think it's important for people to meet face to face and spend time together. But I also think, given the circumstances, remote working is probably the best we have.

Varnavas Sisou 6:31

Great. Um, yeah, I'd love to ask you a question now about well-being. How would you define well-being at the workplace, what's Tudor's definition of well being?

Tudor 6:47

I think there's a few things. And we've, we've been actually working on this, and we've put it into the backbone of the company. So people need to make sure they sleep well, and they exercise well. And rather than working a lot, we should be working very efficient. The most important thing is how well you prioritise. I sleep 8 hours a day. And that's non negotiable. Whatever else I have to do, I cut from whatever else I have to do, rather cutting the sleep. And the reason for that is because in a startup, you face challenges every week. And if you're not well rested, and if you're not healthy, you cannot deal with those things. I've noticed myself that when I sleep well, and then whatever comes during the day, I'm much more relaxed in dealing with it. This means I usually will need to prioritise certain things and just let other fires burn. For me well being is knowing when to say no when knowing only to take as much as you can take and also taking care of your body and mind.

Varnavas Sisou 8:22

Alright, so a great conclusion there. So learning your boundaries, basically both mentally and physically. And like you mentioned, sleep is a huge factor.



Tudor 8:38

Yeah.

Varnavas Sisou 8:39

Perfect. Do you think well-being is affected amongst leaders and employees by working virtually? And if so, in what way?

Tudor 8:52

Yes because people don't feel the personal touch. And it's very easy to feel excluded. People like feeling the energy of the people around us. We're now 10 people, if we were all in an office, and we'll be able to tap on each other's backs that would make a huge difference. But there's ways to do that online as well. Right? That's what I'm saying. It's a balancing act. We have a pub night, every first Tuesday of the month. We have team meetings every week where everyone is on call. And we try to emulate as much as possible of what people can do when they're in an actual office. On the other hand, I do think that the mental strain of meeting face to face in a pandemic is much harder, then people working remotely and not feeling that they can actually speak to their colleagues at all times.

Varnavas Sisou 10:14

All right. I like the distinction you made there between working virtually in normal times and working virtually during a pandemic. Of course, there is a huge difference. And that's understandable. Thank you for that. Do you think there is a differentiation between creating well-being for leaders and, and well-being for employees?

Tudor 10:52

I'm not sure. It depends on how do you define an employee. We actually don't use the word employee in SpeechifAI. At all. I consider every one of my teammates as entrepreneurs in their own right. Because the way SpeechifAI is structured is we have area leaders. That's why all of my teammates are countries, are called leaders in their areas, right. So if you look on LinkedIn, at the SpeechifAI structure, you'll see a data science lead, back end lead, a tech lead, comms and content, business development, account management, and so on. Because they're building the rules of operation in their own area. And, my main responsibility is not to tell them what to do actually I get really annoyed, if I need to tell them that. My main responsibility is to inspire them and give them all the support, they need to make the best decisions for us to meet our common goals. And in this framework, we actually encourage them to do the same thing as we do. Making sure they have enough sleep for example. We don't expect them to work more than 40 hours a week. But we expect those hours to be super efficient and we expect them to meet the goals they have. We expect them to say no, some of my teammates Tell me no when I propose certain things and certain tasks for them. And I'm completely okay with that. Because it's up to them to know how to prioritise certain things. But at the same time, it's Valentin (cofounder) and I who bear the responsibility for everything that happens within the team. It's our responsibility to set the overall vision for the company and all of that. So there is a slight difference here. Now, when we're a 200 person company, and we don't have all the early hires we will also have



other types of employees in the company. I have no idea, we were not there yet. I cannot speak about that.

Varnavas Sisou 13:27

But for now you expect them to handle their well being themselves, right? You basically don't push yourself to provide this well being is just this autonomy that you're providing them to create their own well being, I guess.

Tudor 13:50

I mean there's certain rules we've set up that are meant to provide that. And there's a whole series of rules we have. One of them is experimentation, which is people do a little bit of something and it doesn't need to be perfect. We don't expect people to do perfect jobs, we just expect them to do a little better than what he had before. So they know it's okay for them to fail. Also people can take breaks whenever they feel. We don't really care when they work as long as they're objective. But it's a lot of confidence that we provide. But at the same time, we do have hard discussions when the goals are not met. There's a fine line between being responsible for your schedule and actually not being effective in what you do.

Varnavas Sisou 14:56

exactly. I'd like to ask you why is taking well being in the workplace into consideration so important? How does it influence the workplace?

Tudor 15:11

I think people who feel valued and respected. The most important thing is people feeling comfortable and motivated and productive in what they do. And feeling appreciated and valued. There's many things. It is how you speak to them it's how you value them, and you treat them and how we encourage them to treat each other.

Varnavas Sisou 15:49

How would you describe your personal well, being at the current position

Tudor 15:55

I think I'm getting better and better at, managing the challenges but it comes to periods and periods. One of the things I think I'm getting better at is to be comfortable with the journey itself. Which means I'm not expecting anymore that challenges will be less going forward. I'm just fine with how it is at the moment. I will just give you an example from this week. So Valentin and I met on Monday, we worked together and then I receive a note from the health department that he previously spent time with someone who tested positive for COVID. On Tuesday, he called me and he was like, Man, I'm feeling sick. So I need to be at home and he started coughing and stuff like that. So he took a couple of days off. And we also have a series of important meetings this week. Because of the fact that I'm comfortable, and I expect challenges to come every week, and I sleep enough and do the exercise. so I'm not affected that much about these things, I actually think I can respond quite well. But there has to be a mentality shift in my mind where I'm like, this is the life



of an entrepreneur. there's a lot of challenges that come at you and you just need to be in the mental state that this is a normal kind of situation and comfortable with taking them.

Varnavas Sisou 18:04

That's clear. Thanks a lot. Moving on to the next section, which is about job demands. Would you say that your position entails high or low job demands and if you could name a few of the characteristics of a high or low job demand,

Tudor 18:21

what does the job demand mean?

Varnavas Sisou 18:24

So, job demand can entail lots of things, for instance factors such as time pressure, long working hours, expectations, workload conflicts within the team...

Tudor 18:47

I personally think that my job demands are low because this is the only thing I would rather do. Like to me a high job demand is doing a job which you don't like.

Varnavas Sisou 19:25

Right. So what what are a few characteristics of a low job demand? so the factors that I mentioned before, you don't think they are there?

Tudor 19:38

Let's put it this way. If you work long hours, for a job that you don't like, that's a high job, demand. If you work long hours for a job that you like, that's probably pretty easy because you do it because you enjoy it.

Varnavas Sisou 19:55

Alright, I really like your perspective and the opinion you're giving to this. Regardless if you like it or not, let's talk about facts. So do you feel that you're working long hours? Do you feel that you have high expectations? Too much workload?

Tudor 20:20

Um, the reason why I'm hesitating to answer is because there is this feeling in entrepreneurship that entrepreneurs are these, like superheroes who do things that no one else can? Yeah, it's tough. It's probably the toughest thing that you could do. Building something from scratch and making it innovative. I was in the point of a mental breakdown when I was working at the UN. Because I was working fixed hours, and I felt that I didn't have a voice and I couldn't fit in. For me, that was much tougher than this. Switching from one to the other and dealing with the expectations of people around you, who tell you that you shouldn't do what you're doing was also fucked up and much tougher than what I'm currently doing where I'm actually seeing myself. I think, a couple of weeks ago that Elon Musk had this session in clubhouse, and an entrepreneur asked him, so what words of encouragement do you have for an entrepreneur? And he was like, if you need words of encouragement probably you shouldn't be an entrepreneur. But that means that people



could do these things. They're meant to do it. They're experiencing challenges, because people are experiencing challenges in everything they do, like life has challenges, whether you're an entrepreneur or something else. But if you do what you like you can cope with it much easier, right? That's I'm very, I'm very hesitant. I know what you're aiming at. But I'm pretty sure the other five people, who you spoke to probably gave you what you wanted to hear (Laughs).

Varnavas Sisou 22:26

But it's really valuable, what you're saying, because I see that this situation affects your well being in a positive way. You see, you made this distinction between working for UN and now working for your own startup your own product. So you kind of answered my question about how is this affecting your well being. So thank you for that, very insightful giving your own approach.

Tudor 23:02

What you need to understand is that I am a misfit. I've struggled my entire life to fit somewhere. Most people don't have this experience. Like what I've done is I've created my own environment, because I couldn't fit in any other environment.

Varnavas Sisou 23:22

Perfect. And and as I understand you're very happy and satisfied with this new environment you created for yourself,

Tudor 23:30

I would not use the word happy I would use the word enjoyment. Like happiness is very momentary. The example I give is Nelson Mandela was not happy when he was in prison, because he was fighting for civil rights. Like, that's not why he was there. He was there because he was motivated and disciplined. And then once he met his goal, he enjoyed that. I will not tell you I'm happy every day. But do I enjoy what I do? Do I feel even the tough moments that the journey is something that gives me purpose and enrichment? Yes. But I wouldn't use the word happy.

Varnavas Sisou 24:27

Understood. Thank you so much. And let's move on to job control. In which ways do you feel autonomous and to what extent do you take decisions?

Tudor 24:41

Can you say that again?

Varnavas Sisou 24:42

Yeah, in which ways do you feel autonomous? What's your level of autonomy and which extend to you take decisions?

Tudor 25:04

I mean, I'm not sure if it fully answers the question, one of the things I've learned is that we need to make very quick decisions. I don't spend too much time making this, I just make



a decision, and I go with it. And we encourage that in the team. because spending too much time thinking about the decision, then prolongs a period of inaction. Like my favourite example Google spent 10 days taking the decision to buy YouTube. If Google can make a decision about YouTube in 10 days, I'm pretty sure anyone else can make a quick decision about stuff.

Varnavas Sisou 25:55

Right. And there's a follow up question on that if the virtual environment impacts your decision making?

Tudor 26:07

What do you mean?

Varnavas Sisou 26:08

If, virtual environment slows down the decision making or accelerates it? Since you've always been in a virtual environment setting, Do you think it decreases the decision making or increases it?

Tudor

I actually think decisions can be made much quicker. So for decision to happen, you need input? It's much easier now to gather the input you need by meeting with people than if you had to meet with them face to face. So I take the example of an investment situation. Right? So fundraising used to be you go to a city, you'd meet with people there, you travelled to meet with them there, you'd have multiple meetings and stuff. And then a decision will happen. In the last year and a half people have become comfortable with only making decisions based on online meetings, and this can happen super quickly.

Varnavas Sisou

And taking decisions together with Valentin? Do you think there is a good alignment there? Or is it taking longer? I know that you're in the same city. So is this decision made because you guys are working easier when you're together?

Tudor 27:34

So I do think that very important decisions can be made better in person. So I've actually I've made a conscious decision and actually being as much as possible in the same place as Valentin is, so that we can meet together and look each other in the eye can be close to each other and actually discuss really difficult challenges and also celebrate the good things being together. I've also made an effort to meet with each of our team members face to face, but not necessarily because of working together. But because I wanted to get to know them better in a more personal way.

Varnavas Sisou 28:25

So you do see the value of meeting your co founder in person.

Tudor 28:32

It's very important. It's very important to build a community.



Varnavas Sisou 28:37

Great.

Tudor 28:39

Yeah, meeting face to face is important.

Varnavas Sisou 28:41

Thank you so much. Last section. It's about job support. I'd like to ask you what is the source of you receiving support within the workplace.

Tudor 28:56

So a really important one for me is mentors and advisors. I think that's probably the most important. The second one is feedback. So look at it this way. The startup has multiple layers of community, you have a team, you have customers, you have other people who are impacted by it, you have investors and so on. Valentin and I never run a company before. It's very important for us to get honest feedback from everyone so that we can actually be better at what we do. So that's why advisors are very important because most of them have actually ran companies before. So they can provide us with guidance. Our teammates they usually tell us when they think we have made mistakes, and that for me, it's very important.

Varnavas Sisou 30:07

So you mentioned mentors, advisors, team members, and you really value feedback. These cover the operational support I would say, is there people that you reach out to for motivational support? or emotional?

Tudor 30:31

Yeah, I mean, obviously, like friends and family, who are close. I would think that has been probably one of the biggest challenges in the pandemic. This is because of my personal journey, I usually have friends scattered in multiple places. So for instance, my family is based in Bucharest, but most of my friends are actually in Geneva, in Washington DC, I have some good ones in London as well and in Amsterdam. I haven't been able to actually meet with them that much in person. But that's not a consequence of remote working that the consequences of the pandemic itself. I think that's a separate component,

Varnavas Sisou 31:30

But also the virtual environment is facilitating you reaching out to them.

Tudor 31:37

Of course

Varnavas Sisou 31:37

Okay. Last question. What in your opinion is important that should be included in improving leaders well being? What do you think it's missing that if it's going to be added, it will improve a leader's well being?



Tudor 32:02

I mean, there's a few things that come to mind. I think the most important one is a myth that needs to be broken, leaders usually sleep very little. I actually think that sleep is a really big one and also exercise. Also I think I'm obsessed with SpeechifAI. I think about it all the time. But there's a distinction between working which is doing daily tasks, and actually reading things, and reflecting about things. And this can happen when you actually stop your daily activities. I think that's super important. And also I think, well-being comes from the fact that you need to realise that you're running a marathon. One of the biggest mistakes that entrepreneurs make is thinking that they need to sprint, and then it becomes all of a long sprint, and at some point, they break down. And for a week or two, they're not available. The way I'm thinking of it is running a marathon endorsing your strength and effort means you can be there all the time. Rather than having these ups and downs. I don't think it's the most helpful.

Varnavas Sisou 33:47

Right? So I'm basically mythbusting various perceptions we have about entrepreneurship you think it's gonna really improve a leaders well-being?

Tudor 34:00

Yeah, I think so. Yeah.

Varnavas Sisou 34:03

Thanks so much. That was the end of our interview. Thank you so much for the valuable insights you provided me. I'd like to stop the recording here. And thank you once more, for your time that you invested with me.

Tudor 34:18

Sure. It was my pleasure. Thank you so much.

Interview 8

Varnavas Sisou 0:02

All right. Good morning, Melissa, thank you so much, once again for taking this time to help me out with my thesis topic. For the record, I have informed Melissa that our recording will only be used for research purposes. And all the information that will be shared, will be handled discreetly. Melissa, welcome.

Melissa 0:23

Thank you for having me. Glad to help.`

Varnavas Sisou 0:26

Thank you so much. I would like to start this interview by asking you the first question, which is to explain to me a little bit about your current position, what's the purpose of the company you're building and the capacity of the team and so on.



Melissa 0:46

Yeah so I am currently the CEO and co founder of a very early stage startup called Baubo. And what we try to do at Baubo is to empower women going through the menopausal transition. And we do that leveraging, of course, digital tools. So at the moment, we are building a B2C app where women can follow personalised programmes in order to help them with their symptoms, but where they also join other women in micro communities to be supported through the journey. So we're trying to fill in the gap between doing nothing, which is what a lot of women do, and actually going for more medical approaches and hormonal treatments can be the right way for a lot of women. But if you just aren't willing to get started, get to know your body better. Baubo offers you the platform to do that. In terms of the team, I actually am working together with my co founder Anton. we are right now on a test period with a third co founder, which is in charge of everything related on growth, hacking, and marketing strategy, etc. And we have a fourth team member, which is Mirna and which is part of the target group. And just when she heard that we were building this, she was so enthusiastic and passionate about the topic and help other women that, she decided to join us. So right now we're working with four. And yeah, so far, so good.

Varnavas Sisou 2:12

Perfect. Thanks so much. How would you describe the remote work experience during COVID-19?

Melissa 2:20

Yeah, it's very interesting, because, well, we incorporated the company already beeing in this set of environments, right, we all used to have corporate jobs where we used to have, a team and an office to go to a commute, etc. So I think it has its pros and cons. I think one of the pros is that we don't know better for the setup of the startup. So we started already within these conditions. The cons, however, is that you do miss that personal touch that just turning your back and asking a question, and then keeping on working. And just to build the culture and the spirit of the team is very important. So what we have decided is to actually meet up once a week, face to face. And we started doing this already for a couple of months. And it's working wonders. And we always have kind of the feedback session of the weeks or Mondays we talk about what we liked from the week before what could have been done better, etc. And you always see that for all the team members, the highlight of the week is that day when we have been working together, and typically is the time of the week where you get also most done. And it's crazy, because you can think, okay, I'm at home, I am focused, I can get things done. But you actually get more done when we are together at least that's how we experienced it. So we would love for these to end and I don't think it will go to a nine to five, you know, full time office kind of thing. We love having the flexibility, you know, especially somebody needs to go to a dentist, then it's around the corner from your house, you don't need to commute to an office, etc. But I think we would go to a model where we at least meet three times a week, whenever it's possible.

Varnavas Sisou 4:22



Did your tasks or day to day job differentiated in any sort of way now with this virtual environment, or would you say that you kept doing what you were doing before?

Melissa 4:37

Well, as I say what I was doing before was working for a company what I'm doing right now is working for my own company and building my own company. Right. So I think there is several things that stay or change like for example a weekly team meeting, which typically you would do face to face this is something that now we do on Mondays but we meet in the office on Wednesdays. So the virtual team meeting happens but happens on zoom so that has changed, definitely. But for example, things that have come up, because we have noticed that, hey, we are way more accountable and productive when we are together, how can we leverage digital worlds in order to help us get there. So what we do right now is every morning, we have a check in on slack. It's kind of a stand up, right, but we just do it on Slack, where at 10am, there is a reminder on slack saying, remind yourself to tell your teammates where you're going to be busy with today. And then basically, hey, today, I'm going to be working on the translation of the page into Spanish. We're going to be recruiting three people for circles, and I'm going to be talking to one potential industry. Okay, great. And then team member number two, we'll do exactly the same. And then we also have an overview, what are people busy with, and my team can also see, okay, I really need Melissa for this task, I see that she's busy with these three things. But I can also think that maybe recruiting those three people for circles, she might just recruit one. And I really need her to help me here because otherwise it's a blocker, so that at least gives us visibility, and it allows us to pool resources from one to the other. So that, you know, that's a way where we have creatively kind of broke something that would be a meeting into three bullet points on slack. And, yeah, and being aware of what the others are doing. Now, there'll be one example, for example.

Varnavas Sisou 6:34

And would you just say that these are practices that have basically enhanced this virtual environment. And because I have a question here are relating to your leadership style and skills, do you think your leadership styles and skills have been developed to accommodate this virtual environment?

Melissa 7:03

that's an interesting question. You can adapt certain ways to do things, I don't think your leadership skills or your style particularly changes. So this is just like a way of conveying your leadership style. Like, yeah, for sure. Maybe you need to be more careful in the way you're energising people or in the way you're engaging them. Because simply, it's harder to do online than doing it face to face. But I think if your leadership style is like more an inclusive one. Or if it's more a leadership style, that it's more kind of focused on diversity or on autonomy to your people, you can do exactly the same, you just need to be careful on the way how you convey it. and being a little bit handy on this tech world and maybe if you notice, also your people how your people react and how they act better. Maybe you want to pick up the phone, instead of you know, sending out a slack, if that's something that's going to be motivating somebody better than than just like some people don't want to



pick up the phone and then you know, they might get annoyed if you do that. So think is up to the leader also to know what their audience is.

Varnavas Sisou 8:39

Alright. Yeah. Thanks so much. Moving on to the next section, which is well-being at workplace. What's Melissa's definition for well being at workplace?

Melissa 9:00

Look, it's very funny because I come also from a corporation where it was work hard, play hard and somehow that stays a bit in your DNA. I think it's no different when you're trying to build a startup and everything is going super fast. And you need to, deliver milestones quite fast as well. But I think what has changed now is that I have the autonomy as the co founder, to put all the barriers and to put certain limits. Especially, you know, to be able to say, I'm not going to be working beyond 7pm. If there are things that need to happen, then they will happen. But I think it's also listening to my needs, the needs of my body and listening also to the needs of my people. Again, you know, we're very early stage but two out of the four people in team are working part time because they need to make ends meet. So, I cannot be also asking the same amount from, this third co founder who has another part time job that actually gives the money, which is not the case with with Baubo to also, go on until midnight with us. So yeah, it's about listening to the needs of your body and of your team. And the beauty of being autonomous. And, you know, this is my thesis. And I know that this might not be aligned with a lot of Silicon Valley things. And that's why we need more diverse founders, I think to, develop different theses so that there is not just one way of building a company, which is. For example, I don't see Elon Musk as a role model for me. I don't want to be that guy ever, somebody that doesn't sleep or sleeps in the plant. And I find that obsessive, I find that, yes, you're the richest guy in the world, depending on how the stock moves, but I would consider myself miserable, living their life like that. So for me, well-being is also really having a good balance from being close to myself on what really makes me happy. And yes, I'll be happy working sometimes until 12 at night, on Baubo, because this is also my baby, and I know I'm making an impact on people's lives. So if that's driving me, then it's fine. And if it's not, every day that I'm burning myself out, that's also fine. But I am very clear why I'm doing this, which is not to burn myself out and then end up hating it or hating my family.

Varnavas Sisou 11:48

Right? Do you think the well being is affected for leaders or employees in a virtual environment? And if so, in what way?

Melissa 12:02

Well, what I have noticed, at least in this COVID times, I think we have gone through phases, and he has been some sort of grieving, it's like kind of losing a relative or something like that. And for many people, that has been the reality, with this horrible pandemic, but I think, we started in the beginning was like, Okay, nice, you know, you get to work from home. So there'll be more flexibility, especially if you don't have kids, if you had kids, then it was hell, I can imagine. But then it kind of became Okay, then you're normal, and you get used to it. But then eventually, and, you know, we were talking about this off air, when



we were talking about me needing to go abroad and get some sun, it's been now too long. And now, it's a, you come to a point where it's not like, okay, we're used to it, it's more like I grieve, I miss my previous life, I miss being able to be going to a restaurant with my friends, I miss sitting around the coffee table, at work with my colleagues, and just chit chatting about how their weekend was, or all those events that have moved to online, right. Like if a colleague moves out of the company and whatever, typically, you would have nice drinks, goodbye party, you have the people. But right now, everything happens online, and it becomes awkward. And there are so many of these events that you don't even want to join anymore. Like, first time is nice to have an online quiz or drinks or whatever, for the rest is just chaotic, you cannot even talk everybody's talking on top of each other. So I can't imagine that does affect the well being of the people of the ones that knew how the world was before. And that are right now kind of grieving, losing that. And that eventually, I don't think it will go fully as I said to the previous model, but I think we do need that human contact to come back, at least partially for us to be better in our mind.

Varnavas Sisou 14:07

Yeah. Do you think there was a differentiation between creating well-being for leaders and well-being for employees?

Melissa 14:13

I don't know if there is a differentiation on that. I think maybe the leaders have a little bit more on their shoulders as a responsibility to generate that well-being for their teams. And at the same time, you have the responsibility of leading that by example by, taking the well being on your own shoulders, because if you're a horrible manager.... I mean, I don't think that people working close to Elon Musk, extremely motivated to go back to the poor guy. But, if you know if my team sees that, you know, as of seven, I'm off because I want to, you know, have a nice meal with my family. And, you know, that's part of my well being and if my co founder goes for a run at 12 because it happens to be a beautiful day outside, etc. You know, that's the best example you can give and pass it on to others to say, this is allowed, like, you know, I lead by example, if my boss does that, or if the founder of the company does it, should be fine for me to do it.

Varnavas Sisou 15:19

So you're saying if I understand correctly, that the leaders have to create the well-being for themselves and lead by example, for the employees, is there anybody else who is responsible for the leaders well being?

Melissa 15:42

Well, it depends what kind of position the leader is on, right. Because if the leader is somebody that has a lot of pressure from their investors or their bosses if they are incorporated or whatever then it will always trickle down. If you are in a sort of sandwich then that's where you get really a lot of pressure and a lot of responsibility to kind of hold on the Fords. So that that pressure you're getting doesn't transpire and doesn't trickle down to your team. That's a hard position to be that's a position that I know very well. But yeah, that's also part of the game. So you know, is whenever you can change your destiny, take it into your own hands and kind of manage your manager try to manage your investors are



trying to put a line on, here's what it is, and, and really realise that investors are there, supposedly, to help you and you know, make the company thrive. But if you're not thriving, as the founder, and as the person in the driving seat, the investors will also not get the best out of it. So yeah, I think it's about having these candid conversations. I know a lot of investors don't want to hear this kind of stuff. But then at the end of the day, how much percent do they own of the company? How much percent Do you own? And, you know, that can also be settled that way?

Varnavas Sisou 17:06

Right? How would you describe your overall quality of experience and function network? So in simple words, how is your well being currently in Baubo?

Melissa 17:19

Oh, my well, being is great. Actually, I have an amazing team. And, you know, we're very supportive for each other. As you know, I'm currently pregnant. I'm 30 weeks right now. So I'm soon to go on maternity leave second week of of May. So I'm also extra aware, right that I'm not on my own. I'm like growing two lives inside of me. So I need to sometimes go for a checkup or I need sometimes to really, I just I started really getting tired. And I need to have a nap randomly at 2pm where I hate naps normally, but this is my body talking to me. So yeah, I mean, I am at a position where I don't have that pressure from external agents, the only pressure that we have is from ourselves, of course, to keep pushing the company to keep growing so that we can have a proper MVP so when I come back we start fundraising. And that is working really great. And according to plan, you know, our number one milestone was to find his third co founder, she's doing brilliantly. Everyday there is you know, really new things that we are improving on so alone, I couldn't have made it but I think altogether, I think it's working really great. And I think this combination of seeing each other once a week minimum, it does also help

Varnavas Sisou 18:40

you mentioned again, listening to your body listening to your needs, and your brought, another thing up right now, collectivism, so working all together, which is a very important, I think, thank you for adding that. And yeah, thanks a lot. Moving on to the next section, which is job demand. Would you say that your position entails high or low job demands.

Melissa 19:18

For me is definitely high demand. From the standpoint where I am not only the CEO of the company, but I am also you know, one of the founders and also the person that has had this kind of vision or idea and I have that responsibility of taking people on board with my idea you know, they're sitting up in a in a rocket that might explode or that might really fly. So you know, it's people that are main breadwinners at home and that have decided not to take another job or leave their jobs or what not so only that kind of moral responsibility. So my team, that's already high demand. The second thing is that, you know, I'm also putting, part of my savings or my own equity into the company. So, you know, is something I'm taking out of my household, basically is my savings, but, you know, I can also do something for my children with that money or investing in something else that is less risky, but I decided to invest it in the company. So that's another kind of reminder of how much responsibility



I need to take for this. And thirdly, you know, I'm the one leading the flag and being the face of this company, also out there. So whenever I'm talking to potential investors, etc, so it is definitely a responsibility on, it's not, I'm not having lifestyle business where, you know, creating slushie, and the market on my own, it really has other lives, other people's lives, depending on it. And we start having also people in our community that are also like, trusting us with their personal situations, so that responsibility you have towards the ethical management of the data, and providing value to the consumers. So that I would say in the more bigger scale of things, what kind of demands it is. And then if you want to talk about operational demand, also, because we're a very young team, so that means that I'm not only you know, sitting there and being the CEO, and talking to investors and whatever. But I'm also you know, translating landing pages, and I'm also, picking up the phone and talking to potential clients and interviewing people. And, you know, trying to create a strategy and a business model and iterating pitch decks. So, so, yeah.

Varnavas Sisou 22:03

A lot of expectations, if I can put it in some other words. and you also mentioned responsibility to a high high extent, and I would make this bold and also the risk of your equity, as well as long working hours, time pressure, would you say those are also some factors?

Melissa 22:38

Yeah, absolutely. I would say, you know, long working hours on purpose, I decided not to have long working hours, it has happened, it happens sometimes. Right now, I physically, you know, after 8pm, I'm useless, like I can't, anymore. But that's okay, because of my particular circumstances. But if they are needed, or were needed, when I could, I would, you know, I definitely have put, long, long working hours into the company and happily so. And what did you say? So long working hours and what else?

Varnavas Sisou 23:11

Yeah, just in general, how all these factors because that's, that's enough, affect your well being?

Melissa 23:20

Yeah, exactly. Whenever I was long working hours, I knew that there was time needed and kind of a deadline set up for something. I'm putting these long working hours because I have that pitch, or because I have that special event. but when that is done, then although you need to immediately, pick it up with the next task. I have learned to breathe like, Okay, this is delivered. I'm not going to be working crazy hours for the next two, three days. Because I need a break. And I'm gonna go out and have a walk. And I'm gonna just take a step back .

Varnavas Sisou 24:01

Yeah, thanks a lot. Could you please tell me which ways do you feel autonomous? What's the extent of autonomy you're experiencing? And to which extent do you take decisions within your startup?



Melissa 24:19

Yeah, I would say I feel almost 100% autonomous, of course, I have a co founder, that is a 50-50 co founder, we are both directors of the company with equal votes or saying but I think we're also very aligned on what kind of decisions are the ones that I make? What kind of decision are the one that he makes? And if there are things that you know, need his consultation I do consult him a lot. Also, for things that are not tech related, just because also he's a great, you know, sparring partner and thinker and also somebody that can challenge me very well. So yeah, I would say autonomy, I do have it. Do I take advice, counsel and want to involve my co founder? Yes, as well. And whenever there is, you know, a conflict that is difficult to resolve, we have also lined up from the beginning that at the end of the day, you know, I'm the CEO. So if there is a and b, and we are really towards different paths, a decision needs to be made, and, yeah, then I made the final call.

Varnavas Sisou 25:30

And would you say that this virtual environment impacted your decision making? did it slow it down did it increase it?

Melissa 25:39

I don't think that decision making itself but it's more the process to gather the information to get to the decisions you make. small things like you know, I need some advice from the accountant and the accountant is giving me an appointment for in a week on zoom, not picking up the phone. So everybody's just overloaded and has a zoom fatigue. And it just takes forever, then for me that I need to go on Google and whatever, something that the accountant can tell me on the phone in five minutes. So that I can delay a decision.

Varnavas Sisou 26:14

So it is the stakeholders involved that delay the procedure?

Melissa 26:20

Exactly

Varnavas Sisou 26:20

Alright, thanks a lot. Last section, it's about the job support. And I would like to ask you, where is the source of you receiving support? And this could also be operational, but also motivational or emotional?

Melissa 26:38

Yeah, I think definitely operational, of course, but also motivational. Yeah, it's a lot on the team, right? So and I'm happy that, you know, me and my co founder, were really complimentary, and we'd really get along, and it's really been great working together with the two of us. But since we added extra people to the team, you also add that kind of not only the operational muscles, so that we can do more things and focus on all their stuff ourselves. But also that we have kind of a more diverse team, you know, as I say, we have Mirna who's 52 years old, comes from a long time career in, corporate but needed to leave it because of her menopause concerns, etc. But she's our beta tester living with us day to day. And that's amazing to see for whom you're doing this. And her input is extremely



valuable. Then Xenia, which is the new team member, which is the one that is CMO right now. Yeah, she also has a super different personality, but she's really witty and that kind of just the interactions, the fun, she's really fast, coming back with some ironic joke. Only those kind of small interactions that makes it so much nicer to get that, that motivation part and also both are, you know, extremely hardworking and results driven. And that also motivates you to say, Well, if this lady that is working part time, wants to do 200% for my baby company, how am I not to live up to those expectations? Right? So,

Varnavas Sisou 28:33

that's really lovely to hear. So both for operational and motivational support, you reach out to your team, which is great. And from your words, I can understand that it really pushes you to a great extent. And final question, what in your opinion is important that should be included in improving a leader's well being? What is this something that you as Melissa value, so much that you think is missing? And if it's added, it's gonna impact, your well being or a leader's as well be?

Melissa 29:15

You mean as in missing from where?

Varnavas Sisou 29:20

It could be whatever, this is something that you think that if it's gonna happen, it's gonna change your world, it's gonna make you feel way better. It might be a way you're working with other people, it can be something that you don't see happening, and if it could happen, it would change the whole setup.

Melissa 29:47

I am an idealist. I do believe that we need more role models that create companies in different ways. And that the media also needs to highlight those and celebrate those. I think too often we see the Zuckerbergs, the Musks, and the Bezos out there, as you know, the wahala, of how things must be done and should be done. But if you look at the measurement of success is mostly dollar sign. And, yeah, of course, Tesla is good for the environment and whatever. And Facebook wants to unite the world or whatever, and Bezos wants to make your life convenient or whatever. But at the end of the day, the reason why they have been glorified and highlighted, is not particularly because of their, their well being or their motivation to live a more balanced lifestyle..

Varnavas Sisou 31:03

So what do you think is missing from those three role models that you just mentioned,

Melissa 31:09

I think that, the focus on also showing the vulnerable parts of them, and also showing not only the struggles, but also a healthy lifestyle, as an example. And that's why, I keep mentioning Musk, because his private life has been so public and he has been so proud of not sleeping and sleeping in the factory and whatever. I find that scandalous that we give so much media attention to something that is such a bad example. And do we want future young entrepreneurs to follow those steps, that means that these are going to be Horrible



Bosses. These are going to be people that are not going to value anything beyond the dollar sign. So yeah, I think there needs to be that shift. And also, it's also about sustainability, right? Because it's making business in a sustainable fashion, not only for the planet, but sustainable for us as human beings to be able to have a normal life that fulfils you beyond making you rich. It's a little bit philosophical. But I truly believe that.

Varnavas Sisou 32:25

no, very insightful. Of course, this leads us to the end of this interview, is there anything else you'd like to add to this topic we have discussed

Melissa 32:41

in terms of well being, well I can never leave without making my point in terms of diversity. And I do believe that the world has been shaped by very, very homogeneous type of people for millennia. And I think it's time to give space to a diverse type of leadership. And, you know, that comes in the shape of gender. But that also comes in the shape of ethnicity, and sexual orientation and all that kind of stuff. I think we have been very unilinear in the way that businesses and countries have been managed. And I think it's time to look a little bit more, less linear and more circular. And I think that will come easier if we simply just shake it up and mix up the qualities and the characteristics of the leaders. So yeah, I go back to the whole role modelling thing, but I think it's important to start showing how it can also be done. That it's not, you know, by a white old man.

Varnavas Sisou 33:45

Thank you so much, Melissa. Very, very informative, very insightful indeed. I'd like to conclude our interview here, and I'm just going to stop the recording. Once again, thanking you for taking the time to help me Thanks a lot.

Melissa 34:03

Thank you.

F. Colour Coding Table

PROPOSITION	SUB-THEMES	INTERVIEWS
Job demand	Time pressure	<p>I work well under pressure. When things are very comfortable I become paranoid, I'm like, there's no way things are this good. Something is wrong, like the world generally is against you(1)</p> <p>I come also from a corporation where it was work hard, play hard and somehow that stays a bit in your DNA. I think it's no different when you're trying to build a startup and everything is going super fast. And you need to, deliver milestones quite fast as well. (6)</p>
	Workload/long working hours	<p>I can do this 24/7. That's not an issue. (2)</p> <p>Most days it's fun. I think I'd be quite bored if.... So I have long hours, but at the same time I have flexibility in how I'm working and when, so that's okay (3)</p> <p>I call myself a workaholic. So I'm a person that usually wakes up at 5:40 and starts working half an hour after. And I, sometimes I had days that I was working until two or 3:00 AM in the next morning. So yeah, but I enjoy it. That's something I like, and that's why I'm doing it (4)</p> <p>The job itself it is demanding, but it always is when it's the beginning. Especially in startups. If you want to build up something and make it successful, there is a lot of pain, a lot of long hours, that they go into it. You can't just have that nine to five mentality (5)</p> <p>I was long working hours, I knew that there was time needed and kind of a deadline set up for something. I'm putting these long working hours because I have that pitch, or because I have that special event. but when that is done, then although you need to immediately, pick it up with the next task. I have learned to breathe like, Okay, this is delivered. I'm not going to be working crazy hours for the next two, three days. Because I need a break. And I'm gonna go out and have a walk. And I'm gonna just take a step back .(6)</p> <p>I definitely prefer more the ups. Let's say when there's a lot of classes in their program, and there's a lot of things happening. Because, yeah, the new experiences, new people, I get energy out of that because I am extrovert and I also think it's healthy. Of course not to have 100% pressure every month because we would all go crazy. So it's fine that it is cyclical (7)</p>

	Expectations	<p>'Because before it's like you have to travel you have to pay and people are suddenly "I'm very busy, the key decision makers are in some country travelling" now it's like, "yeah, just get on that zoom call, and let's get things done." So, you know, things are way easier for us in terms of how we talk to customers, and what they're looking for." (1)</p> <p>the current position I'm in it's totally dependent on me and my co-founder right. So I cannot rest. I cannot think, I cannot really turn off because I know if I do then, everything that we've built so far is gonna go crumbling down. (2)</p> <p>I'm of the idea that they have to have someone to look up to. So if they see you stressed or out of control, I believe that will lose you credibility. (4)</p> <p>when the company started, it was less competition, but as time progressed, now there are more companies or startups, or even private chefs that they develop a website and they go out to sell their products. So in order for that, now we are expected to be even more agile. It's our job to communicate clearly to the outside world, how we are different and how we do it better (5)</p> <p>I think maybe the leaders have a little bit more on their shoulders as a responsibility to generate that well-being for their teams. And at the same time, you have the responsibility of leading that by example by, taking the well being on your own shoulders, because if you're a horrible manager (6)</p> <p>I think I have also gained enough experience to know what I can handle and what not. I think I have a good enough relationship with my colleagues to be able to also push back if things don't work out or to take on extra work. (7)</p> <p>We don't expect them to work more than 40 hours a week. But we expect those hours to be super efficient and we expect them to meet the goals they have. We expect them to say no. (8)</p>
	Work life balance	<p>Now I spend a little bit more time with myself than Work, work, work and that become more productive. I'm going to spend literally eight hours working on my startup. And then the rest of the time, I need to take care of myself. Because you're not productive, because spend 20 hours do the same thing. Right? So rather, spend less and do more. (1)</p> <p>I think it made me more flexible to kind of follow my natural rhythm in the sense that I can just be super focused and block my time and kind of stick to it (3)</p> <p>. (4)</p> <p>We love having the flexibility, you know, especially somebody needs to go to a dentist, then it's around the corner from your house, you don't need to commute to an office, etc. (6)</p> <p>I think it's also listening to my needs, the needs of my body and listening also to the needs of my people. (6)</p>

		I sleep 8 hours a day. And that's non negotiable. Whatever else I have to do, I cut from whatever else I have to do, rather cutting the sleep. And the reason for that is because in a startup, you face challenges every week. And if you're not well rested, and if you're not healthy, you cannot deal with those things.(8)
	Stress	<p>I'm always stressing all the time(laughs). But I'm managing in my own way. So I'm stressful, but not to a point where, that I need to do this Sabbatical I need to go sleep in a couch... It is manageable stress, because if that wasn't the case, then something's broken somewhere.(1)</p> <p>The way I see it is people have given up on good paying jobs, putting their families on the line following a startup. So I need to make sure that they believe in it, I need to make sure that they are financially covered. So that implies that you know, you need to do your fundraising, I need to make sure that the product works.(1)</p> <p>I'm not saying that leaders are freaking robots of course you have to express yourself, but don't show that you are stressed. They can be stressed a leader can't!(4)</p> <p>It's mostly the pressure to make sure that we stay afloat. It's the responsibility of being ambassadors and making sure that everything runs smooth as near perfect. the stress or the anxiousness or the uncertainty of going somewhere of what's going to be the end result because you can't really forecast it. (5)</p> <p>But there are also definitely days where I think I don't feel motivated. And I am wondering are we ever, you know, going to come out of this? I think what affects my well being negatively also is just how is the overall performance of the company? Are we doing well? Are we doing not? factors that I may not be able to influence? It can negatively impact my well being (7)</p> <p>it's very easy to feel excluded. People like feeling the energy of the people around us. we're now 10 people, if we were all in an office, and we'll be able to tap on each other's backs that would make a huge difference. (8)</p>
Job control	Skill discretion	<p>But I think it just improved my leadership skills in a way. Because, I mean, when you're talking to someone on video, versus on an email, or in a boardroom setting, there are so many things to think about, right? You need to think about, like how you dress. So for example, go to P capital, they all dressed up in their fancy suits and some cool cologne. But in COVID, I could just put on a T shirt and pants, I wouldn't be very conscious of myself, I just focus on the content. (1)</p> <p>So even when you're speaking to investors or customers, it's very casual, you're not very like wordy as you would be in a normal world in a suit. (1)</p> <p>So we don't push things too much because if you push a graphic designer, for example or an animator, if you push them too much, then they lose their creativity. (4)</p> <p>you need to be more careful in the way you're energising people or in the way you're engaging them. Because simply, it's harder to do online than doing it face to face. (6)</p>

		<p>the way SpeechifAI is structured is we have area leaders. Because they're building the rules of operation in their own area. And, my main responsibility is not to tell them what to do actually I get really annoyed, if I need to tell them that. My main responsibility is to inspire them and give them all the support, they need to make the best decisions for us to meet our common goals. (8)</p>
	Decision authority & Timing	<p>everything that I'm doing is based on experience intuition and just hustle that others in the team don't have. So there's always that sort of belief from the team that okay, he knows what he's doing. Let's just follow him whatever that is, yeah. (1)</p> <p>To a full extent, right. So it's, me and my co-founder. The most important decisions we discuss together or some of the decisions in, our areas we do autonomously. (2)</p> <p>I try to make my decisions based on data. So I don't think the decision-making is affected by the virtual environment (2)</p> <p>A graphic designer can do a design much better than I can do, a Content writer can create a content much better than I can do it. So yeah, we fully trust them on that. (4)</p> <p>I will be given the problem and I'm supposed come up with proposals or what tools to recommend that we might take onboard. But the end decision, it will be taken from the CEO who is also the CTO of the company. (5)</p> <p>I need some advice from the accountant and the accountant is giving me an appointment for in a week on zoom, not picking up the phone. So everybody's just overloaded and has a zoom fatigue. And it just takes forever, then for me that I need to go on Google and whatever, something that the accountant can tell me on the phone in five minutes. So that I can delay a decision (6)</p> <p>just being available online is very important, I always tried to be very responsive, communicative, having the right communication systems in place as an employer is super important to keep that communication going and then to allow for people to take decisions quickly.(7)</p> <p>I actually think decisions can be made much quicker. So for decision to happen, you need input? It's much easier now to gather the input you need by meeting with people than if you had to meet with them face to face. (8)</p> <p>we need to make very quick decisions. I don't spend too much time making this, I just make a decision, and I go with it. And we encourage that in the team. because spending too much time thinking about the decision, then prolongs a period of inaction (8)</p>
	Autonomy	<p>To me, autonomy is not so much about who's the ultimate decision maker. We're not very hierarchical. So very often it's going to be a discussion. It's not anyone's idea that wins, but we kind of build onto each other's ideas. And yeah, I think I have pretty high degree of autonomy. To me it's more about being able to chip in and have your ideas heard...(3)</p>

		<p>I have the autonomy as the co founder, to put all the barriers and to put certain limits. Especially, you know, to be able to say, I'm not going to be working beyond 7pm.(6)</p> <p>I feel almost 100% autonomous. Do I take advice, counsel and want to involve my co founder? Yes, as well. And whenever there is, you know, a conflict that is difficult to resolve, we have also lined up from the beginning that at the end of the day, you know, I'm the CEO. So if there is a and b, and we are really towards different paths, a decision needs to be made, and, yeah, then I made the final call. (6)</p> <p>I feel very autonomous in decision making in Antler. I feel that we have a culture in which it is very much appreciated, where you take decisions and also take initiatives and I have not ever experienced being sort of negatively harassed because of taking a decision or taking an initiative</p>
	Method Control	<p>I've been working virtually pretty much for a very long time. So for me, it's not like a new experience. But for people that we on boarded, it's always How do I address this? How do I handle this, you know, so if anything, it has actually given me the whole codependency triangle that you need in a team where it's like, we need the CEO without the CEO, this wont fly(1)</p> <p>To ensure that they get everything, that you are aligned with them, that the quality of their work is not subpar, to make sure that they follow up on the deadlines. Maybe the motivation also might be low. (5)</p>
Job support	Role Clarity	<p>I think I had to become much more clear in messages that I want to come across and those kinds of things. So I think I became like more crisp and, or it pushed me to become more crisp and More to the point because there's certain limitations with video chats. (2)</p> <p>when I think about job's support, I think about functional support. So that would probably be from my manager, from the partners that I can reach out to.(3)</p>

	Collective leadership	<p>So I always say, build empathy, and really try to connect with people that you're working with, not just on, like, on a very functional level. So this is what we do. This is your role. (1)</p> <p>we actually want to create a workspace where everybody loves what they're doing. And that energy feeds the leader as well (2)</p> <p>We urge junior members to come up with ideas, we do give them the free space and time to work on problems, but of course, under higher observation. (4)</p> <p>the more empathetic you are the more the support systems and your end leaders can function better with their employees and vice versa, like how considerate you are in everything. (5)</p> <p>you actually get more done when we are together at least that's how we experienced it [.....]we would go to a model where we at least meet three times a week, whenever it's possible.(6)</p>
	Motivational support	<p>But I would say you need to find out how to manage you know those thoughts, because that's a very difficult thing to do, especially during the pandemic, where one minute you're like, "Yeah, we're about to do it" next day, things are closed. Right, so having a very realistic, optimistic mindset is one of the things that I'm always saying people should cultivate.(1)</p> <p>So if you're receiving this emotional support from the family is very rewarding. but another really important thing is feedback from customers, investors, and business partners. (2)</p> <p>also the more social support, which is like, just feeling like you're part of a team and that's more the Amsterdam team (3)</p> <p>we always have kind of the feedback session of the weeks or Mondays we talk about what we liked from the week before what could have been done better, etc. And you always see that for all the team members, the highlight of the week is that day when we have been working together, and typically is the time of the week where you get also most done.(6)</p> <p>Only those kind of small interactions that makes it so much nicer to get that, that motivation part and also both are, you know, extremely hardworking and results driven. And that also motivates you to say, Well, if this lady that is working part time, wants to do 200% for my baby company, how am I not to live up to those expectations? Right? (6)</p> <p>I feel strong about having sort of a support network in the team and sort of more informal relationships with colleagues and having just fun activities, those kinds of things have really helped me.(7)</p>

		<p>The most important thing is people feeling comfortable and motivated and productive in what they do. And feeling appreciated and valued. There's many things. It is how you speak to them it's how you value them, and you treat them and how we encourage them to treat each other.(8)</p> <p>So a really important one for me is mentors and advisors. I think that's probably the most important. The second one is feedback.(8)</p>
	Improved leader's well-being	<p>I think empathy, and humility. Yeah, there's this toxic culture where they think if you are a CEO or a tech guy, you need to be very arrogant, very brutal, that very loud</p> <p>to filter out the negativity because there's going to be a lot of it.</p> <p>So for some people it's going to be more training on the people's skills. it's more powerful when it's in person and it's also more powerful if we could meet all together rather than one-on-one every time. Yeah. I think remote works well provided you have one in-person interaction. (3)</p> <p>we need more diverse founders, I think to, develop different theses so that there is not just one way of building a company,(7)</p> <p>I am an idealist. I do believe that we need more role models that create companies in different ways. And that the media also needs to highlight those and celebrate those. I think too often we see the Zuckerbergs, the Musks, and the Bezos out there, as you know, the wahala, of how things must be done and should be done. But if you look at the measurement of success is mostly dollar sign. (the focus on also showing the vulnerable parts of them, and also showing not only the struggles, but also a healthy lifestyle, as an example)... diversity, sustainability(8)</p> <p>a lot of people get promoted at some point into leadership roles without ever being given training, or the only reference you have is the managers you've had in the past, whether you liked or whether you did not like their management style. So I think it would be very important if we would have some sort of more guidance on how do you manage others what different leadership styles suit you? What works for you? How do you communicate as a leader, how do you indeed work remotely or not? And how do you lead meetings effectively.(6)</p> <p>there is this feeling in entrepreneurship that entrepreneurs are these, like superheroes who do things that no one else can? Yeah, it's tough. It's probably the toughest thing that you could do. Building something from scratch and making it innovative.(1)</p> <p>I think the most important one is a myth that needs to be broken, leaders usually sleep very little. I actually think that sleep is a really big one and also exercise. One of the biggest mistakes that entrepreneurs make is thinking that they need to sprint, and then it becomes all of a long sprint, and at some point, they break down. (7)</p>

G. Client Deliverable



AGENDA:

1. Optimally engaging with a remote team
2. The importance of a mentor for a leader
3. Redefining entrepreneurship
4. Actively enhancing wellbeing
5. Quiz
6. Feedback



Optimally engaging with a remote team

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Understand common remote working challenges

- ❖ Lack of face time
- ❖ Communication hurdles
- ❖ Surrounding distractions



To lead a remote team well, managers may discover they need to loosen their reins a little while finding ways to continue to hold employees accountable. On this slide you can see the three main challenges, leaders encounter, when managing a remote workforce.

- Since humans are social creatures, face-to-face interaction is vital to our daily exchanges. This includes our workplace encounters. The absence of in-person communication can be strongly felt by mobile team members – perhaps more so during times of stress or change.
- When working remotely, we cannot just simply tap our colleagues' back to ask a question. Plus sometimes quick digital messages can go unnoticed. Even the social communication which is not work related but facilitates the working environment is absent. Finally people that face-to-face may be pleasant to be around might come across as direct and insensitive in digital communication and that definitely impacts the workplace.
- Remote working goes hand in hand with distractions of every day life within the house environment. This could be a cheerful (or whining) child, a pet, the post, the neighbor who decided to renovate. And all these factors definitely distract and affect an employee's productivity.

Establish clear productivity standards

- ❖ Expectations
- ❖ Deadlines
- ❖ Keep good documentation of productivity
- ❖ Always be aware of individual situations



In order to enhance an employee's productivity you need to minimize to the fullest extent the aforementioned challenges. One way of doing this is by establishing clear productivity standards.

- Very clear and specific expectations, for instance everyone being available for meetings from 9am to 5 pm.
- Same goes with deadlines. Making sure that everyone is aligned with the predetermined deadlines is crucial for the smooth operations of the company. Also, a fixed number of hours notice should be given in case a deadline cannot be met.
- The leader should keep track of the productivity rate because it might be very helpful to track productivity bottlenecks that need to be addressed and resolved.
- Finally as mentioned in the previous slide a leader should always be aware of the individual situation of every team member since they might not have the ideal working environment and that could impact their productivity.

Identify and provide the right tools

- ❖ Manuals & SOPs (Standard Operating procedures)
- ❖ Software programs
- ❖ Templates
- ❖ Stationery



An important aspect of successfully managing remote employees is to make all necessary tools easily accessible as needed. To meet that need, leaders and teams may have to puzzle through what should be put in place to ease a telecommuting transition. A remote employee should be able to have the same resources as the ones that possibly had in the office. The leaders need to provide their team with all the digital tools that may be needed for instance manuals or SOPs that might have been previously found as a hard copy. Hardware such as laptops or even ergonomic office chairs, and software to execute every project from home. If the team has the right tools to accomplish the tasks then the performance of the team should not be greatly affected.



Give your team a voice

- ❖ Best practices
- ❖ Best resources
- ❖ Time management ideas
- ❖ Effective strategies



It's no news that every team member should have a voice regarding the prosperity of the company. But especially in these times team members who have worked in a virtual setting before may have advice to share, including what software is most helpful or what's required to set up a home office. Listen to them and be open for innovative tools or resources, best practices and strategies and time management ideas to better perform while being apart.

Regular follow-ups

- ❖ General check-ins
- ❖ Discuss plans for the employee's
- ❖ Answer any questions that might arise regarding the operations.

Lastly, as mentioned before lack of face time is one of the biggest challenges for a remote team. One-on-one calls apart from being used to monitor productivity they can also be powerful means of keeping remote employees motivated and engaged. Regularly scheduled meetings can determine the general wellbeing of a team member, eliminate bottlenecks and answer work-related questions and discuss their professional development.



The importance of a mentor for a leader

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Comfort Zone? What comfort zone?

The mentor profiles:

The challenger - asks questions about *why* your comfort zone is the way it is, until it no longer exists.

The cheerleader - boosts your self-esteem and confidence until you feel brave enough to step over your own boundaries.

The coach - a veteran who provides the knowledge you need to innovate



Before you start looking for a mentor, consider what it is you *really* need out of the relationship. Base your search off of that and be honest when you connect with potential mentors. In any case these three categories are based on the different needs of the mentee! Do you need someone to push you out of your comfort zone? Then you probably need a challenger! Do you constantly need someone to uplift you and to remind you how capable of accomplishing things you are? Then you need a cheerleader. Do you simply need a "father-figure" to advise you in difficult situations because he's been through that? Then the coach profile seems the most suitable for you. And don't forget. Antler provides a coach but feel free to have an external mentor as well.



Learn How To Accept And Give Feedback

An essential skill for every leader:

- Improves performance
- Improves active listening
- Enhances motivation
- Encourages continuous learning



Having a mentor means you're literally asking someone to give you criticism all the time. This means that you'll need to learn how to accept that feedback - which will serve you in many ways. Ultimately, if the feedback is incorporated correctly it should improve performance and enhance your motivation to perform at a higher level. This will encourage a continuous improvement in an effort to perform better as a leader and trains the active listening skills which is an important skill to have when dealing with your team or with external stakeholders such as investors, partners etc.

Reduced Stress

- An active listener who will try and find a solution for/with you.
- Confident that everything will stay between the two of you.
- Great relationship centered around a mutual passion.
- Experienced advice



A mentor is basically a pure relief. It's the go-to person to unload every work-related issue. They'll listen, help you dissect exactly what's bothering you, and provide support as you think of solutions together. Mentorship is all about forming a great relationship centered around a mutual passion. You must achieve total honesty, perfect your communication, and connect frequently. It's a lot of work, but if you do it right, your career will soar to new heights.

Redefining entrepreneurship

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Myth-busting the stereotypical beliefs of entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurs are often ruthless or deceptive

Entrepreneurs should give little attention to their personal life

Entrepreneurs are mainly motivated to get rich

Women entrepreneurs are not risk takers

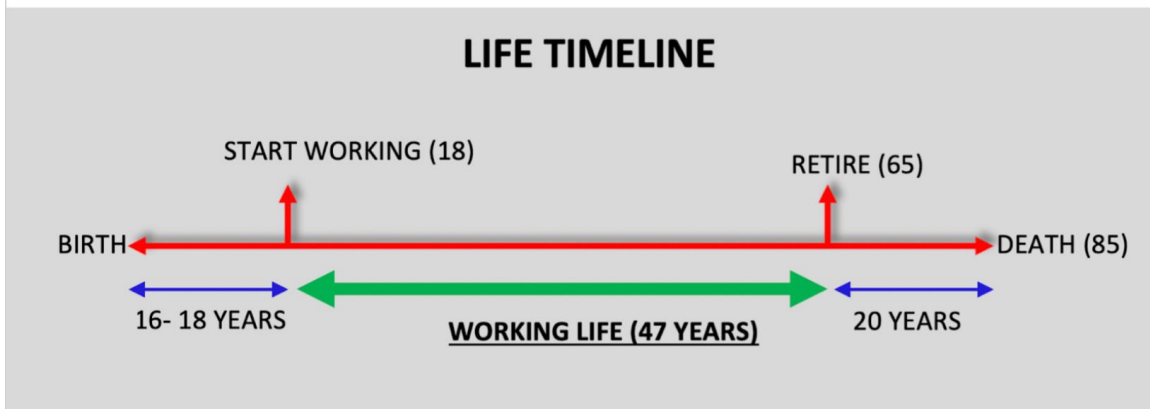




It is about time to reconsider and stop generate or recycle all these false perceptions about entrepreneurship. Clear up any misconceptions you might have about entrepreneurship. These four are just some of the many stereotypes that revolve around entrepreneurship.

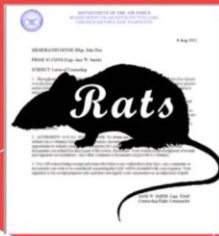
- **Entrepreneurs are often ruthless or deceptive:** some people believe that to make it as an entrepreneur, you have to be deceptive and step on anybody who gets in your way. On the contrary, this mode of operation doesn't work for the entrepreneur. Such entrepreneurs are likely to waste time and energy repairing relationships with employees, customers, and suppliers, or simply fail.
- **Entrepreneurs should give little attention to their personal life** (The so-called Grind): One of the biggest misconceptions and worst practices for a successful entrepreneur. As an entrepreneur with an especially fast-growing business, you are going to have to sacrifice personal time. However having a balance should always be a priority. After all, if your life is out of balance, you won't be able to excel in any area and working longer is usually not more productive but instead a waste of time.
- **Entrepreneurs are mainly motivated to get rich:** Yes. It is one of the biggest motivator but there are many more and sometimes equal factors that drive entrepreneurs towards their goal. Ethical satisfaction, personal goal accomplishment, recognition, self esteem, social development through their business are some of the great motivators apart from the monetary benefits.
- **Women entrepreneurs are not risk takers:** One evolutionary theory suggests that when men portrayed risk-taking behaviors such as fighting for food and territory to oust their rivals, they were rewarded with more mates and domination. However a growing body of scientific evidence suggests that this theory is false. After the discovery of hormones, this theory started to take deeper roots as levels of testosterone, a stereotypical "male hormone" which men and women both have, were found to be associated with risk taking. Additionally, women and men may engage in different types of risk-taking behaviours and such behaviours may be domain specific. Finally, women and men may perceive the same risk in different ways and thus make different trade-offs. So there is another myth down the drain.

Food for thought!



Do you know what day of the week you are most likely to die from a heart attack? It's Monday! care to guess what tim? between 8:00 and 9:00 am! do you know what else happens Monday at 8:00? that is the same day and time people get ready to go into jobs the hate! Coincidence? I don't think so! My point is that we better be enjoying what we do and not sacrifice our health for an unfulfilling job.

Food for thought!



Stop buying into the lies society has told, like how overworking is cool and being stressed out is a status symbol. Quit the rat race and find purpose and happiness within your life-work balance.

Life-Work balance?



Intelligence

Creativity

Productivity

More money

Live longer

You might think that I made a mistake but think about it! Shouldn't life be first instead of work? Because when life is better, work is also better. Harvard professor Shawn Achor discovered the so-called "Happiness advantage". His studies prove that 75% of job success can be predicted by not how smart you are, not how talented you are but how happy you are. His research is decisive. he says when you're happy, your intelligence rises, creativity rises, your productivity rises and you know what else is funny also make more money but more importantly you live longer too. It is proven that optimistic people live longer than pessimistic people. So the life timeline we saw before can be actually extended.



Conventional vs unconventional definition of an entrepreneur

→ A disruptive individual, of vital and increasing importance to the global economy, who makes substantial personal sacrifice in the pursuit of change and personal freedom.

→ A disruptive individual, of vital and increasing importance to the global economy, **who is aware of their own mental and physical boundaries and guardian of their own wellbeing** in the pursuit of change and personal freedom.

I have read a comment from an entrepreneur that entrepreneurship means that you have to be willing to sleep in your car and laugh about it. Also, that Elon Musk sleeps in his factory. If those sacrifices make you happy then I won't stop anyone. But here is my definition of an unconventional entrepreneur.

The Antler logo, a white stylized 'A' shape, is positioned to the left of the text.

Actively enhancing wellbeing

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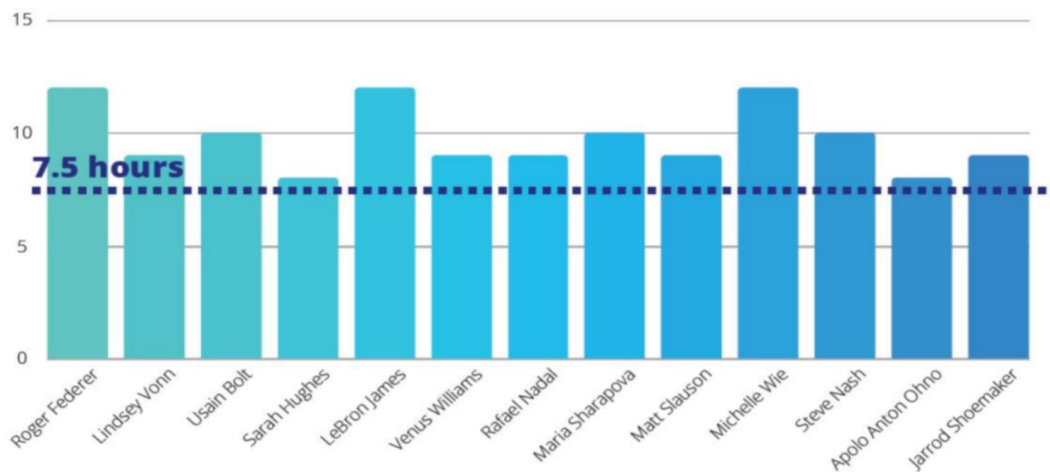
Importance of sleep

Sleeping is your recovery process:

- Skin cells & tissue renewal
- Physical restoration
- Recharge of immune-system
- Increase in HGH (repairs cell damage)
- Information processing
- Mood regulation

The first and foremost aspect for an improved wellbeing is sleep. Why do we sleep? On this slide you may find a list of different reasons. Sleep helps the functioning of all organs in our body and the most interesting thing is that lack of sleep is having a negative effect on them. Your immune system is not functioning properly which can have catastrophic impact on your health.. Moreover sleep is helping us during the day with learning, memorising and making decisions and dreaming helps us becoming more creative.

Sleep like a Champion



The importance of sleep can be realised when looking at world famous athletes. This brings us to the question what is a good amount of sleep and how we can improve it? Studies have shown that your body needs about 5 cycles of sleep which are approximately last for 90 minutes per cycle. Multiplying that gives approximately 7.5 hours of sleep.



4 Steps away from being the Master of Sleep

YOUR STEPS TO GREAT SLEEP	
Analyse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test how much sleep you need • Calculate your sleep time
Adapt your environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Room: dark & cold & quiet, no work • Don't mess with your circadian cycle
Optimize Evening Routine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workouts, water & heavy meals • Tools: Lavender, journals, 4 - 7 -8, nose breathing, 3 Priorities
Optimize Day Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coffee & Alcohol • NASA napping (1pm and 4pm)

There are 4 steps that you can follow which can drastically improve not only your night sleep but also your performance during the day.

-The first step is to Analyse. It is really important to calculate the exact time that you have to be in bed. We have mentioned before that the ideal sleeping time is 7.5 hours. So if you need to wake up at 7 am that means you need to go to bed at 11:30 pm.

- The next step -if you know that you need to be asleep at 11:30- is to adapt your sleeping environment. You need to start preparing two hours before by preparing your whole house. Try to lower the lights, limit blue light and close every curtain to minimize any external light source. Moreover any noises should also be minimized.

- The third step deals with the optimization of your evening routine. If your goal is to sleep at 11:30 your goal is to not have any heavy workouts or meals after 8 because the high levels of CO₂ in your body will not allow you to sleep well. There are a series of activities that can facilitate sleep like a few drops of Lavender on the pillow that get you in a rest mode, journal writing which allows you to jot your thoughts down and allow you to rest and finally using the 4-7-8 technique which is basically 4 seconds inhaling from nose, 7 seconds holding your breath and 8 seconds exhaling from mouth.

- Lastly the Day structure. Both coffee and alcohol are proven to affect your quality of sleep. So it is advised to avoid any coffee or alcohol 8 hours before going to bed. Last but not least, in case you have missed the dedicated hours of sleep try and recover for those hours the following day. You may use NASA's strategic napping of up to 26 minutes which has been proven to have increased productivity of up to 50%. It has also been proven that the ideal time to have this strategic nap is between 1pm and 4 pm otherwise the so-called sleep pressure is not that high if you sleep after 4pm.



Get those muscles moving

Perks of being physically active:

1. Improved sleep
2. Increased energy and stamina
3. Reduced tiredness that can increase mental alertness
4. Weight reduction
5. Reduced cholesterol and improved cardiovascular fitness

It is scientifically proven that exercise improves mental health by reducing anxiety, depression, and negative mood and by improving self-esteem and cognitive function. Apart from the mental improvement that is impacted dramatically, there are also physical health benefits involved. Endorphins are our body's natural hormones that get released when we are doing something that requires a burst of energy — they are the things that make us perform and exercise tends to increase those levels. It's the endorphin release that contributes to the feeling of euphoria which makes us more energetic instead of tired.

How about Meditation?

Meditation	
<i>Increases</i>	<i>Decreases</i>
Positive emotions	Loneliness
Life satisfaction	Pain
Brain Volume	Anxiety
Memory	Stress
Attention	Depression

Meditation is simply three words: stop-look-listen. It is the practice of letting go. The idea of meditation is to improve the relationship between yourself and others around you throughout the day. Nowadays we are forced to react in every stimulus and that is creating high levels of stress. Do not underestimate the benefits of meditation. Similar to what sleep does to our body, meditation has proved to be beneficial for our mental health. The benefits of meditation are endless and the effort required is minimal. Only 15 minutes a day. You may find plenty of techniques online that fit your preferences and schedule.



Building Resilience

- ❖ Realise that you are in control
- ❖ Take action
- ❖ Reach out
- ❖ Talk out your concerns or anxieties



Being an entrepreneur is hard. Harder than you might think. And especially the Antler program is a fast paced and high demanding venture. As if that was not enough, the pandemic is putting extra pressure and complicates everything. But do not forget that you are in control. Take action as soon as you realise that you are struggling to keep up. Reach out to any of the Antler member, Antler coach, external coach or cofounder.

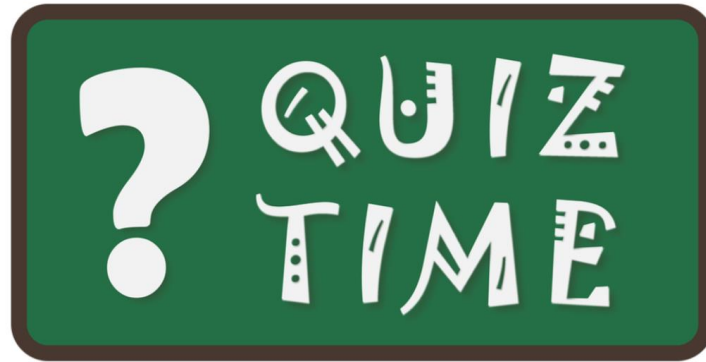
Quiz Time!!

www.antler.co



Please fill in the Mentimeter quiz

Please use this [link](#) to answer the question.



The purpose of this quiz is to share the biggest pain points of entrepreneurship and ways that you can handle these. (This quiz will initiate an open discussion in which founders can be benefitted from each other. The responses are anonymous)



What do you think is the biggest pain point of an entrepreneur? What are your best tips to handle this?

Short answers are recommended. You have 250 characters left.



Submit



Feedback form

Take a few minutes to fill in [this feedback form](#) regarding your opinion about this presentation.

www.antler.co

Questions Responses



AMS4 Booster Session "Redefining and Optimizing Entrepreneurship" Feedback

Our goal is to make your time with Antler as productive and positive as possible! To be able to evaluate this session we ask you to answer a few feedback questions.

By default, this feedback is anonymous. However if you would like us to be able to reach out to you for further discussion regarding your feedback, please feel free to provide your name.



Redefining and Optimizing Entrepreneurship: on a scale from 0 to 10, how would you rate this session?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What is the reason for that score?

Long answer text

Which part was most useful to you?

Long answer text

Which part was least useful to you?

Long answer text

Was there anything else you would expect to see?

Long answer text

Your name (optional)

Short answer text



Thank you for your attention

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H. Deliverable evaluation

Evaluation Form Company Project/Research

(EVALUATION FORM OF ALL CLIENTS AND ON ALL DELIVERABLES IS COMPULSORY, FORMAT IS NOT)



Name of student:	Varnavas Sisou	Student number:	
Name of company:	Antler Amsterdam	Department:	Program
Name of company tutor:	Hayden Young	Position of company tutor:	Marketing & Portfolio Manager
Project/Deliverable: (please specify)	Create a new session/workshop within the Antler startup generator program to help our founders understand the importance of work-life balance and the benefits of good mental health while they look to build the companies of tomorrow.		
During the first evaluation the proposal for the project and end deliverable is discussed. For this final evaluation the project is evaluated. This is taken into consideration for the final assessment of the student.			

Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
Good	In-depth use of relevant literature and knowledge of the field. The deliverable shows excellent thinking capacity of the student (taking into account all significant factors and looking from all different perspectives).	Use of relevant literature and knowledge of the field. The deliverable shows mostly intellectual depth (taking into account significant factors and looking from different perspectives).	No or incorrect use of literature and knowledge of the field. The deliverable lacks intellectual depth.	The deliverable takes into account several factors of building a startup and why it isn't always easy to focus on yourself when working long hours eg. comfort zone. It provides multiple ways to reap the rewards as well including sleep, meditation etc.

Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
Good	The theories and models are skillfully applied and the student can translate this in a unique solution action. The student can relate situations to concepts that results into a solution that adds great value to the company's overall strategy. The creative solution is/ can be implemented and evaluated and is solving the problem.	The student uses theory and models and shows understanding of the issues at hand. The solution is realistic and implementable for the company. The solution is/ can be implemented and evaluated.	Mentioning theory and models, but not using them in the correct way. The student cannot convince of the possibilities to implement and evaluate. It is not solving the problem.	Though it's missing use of models I don't feel the content calls for this particularly. It does back up most assumptions with data and again shows evidence of the issues founders face in their day to day. Much of this is implemental but it could go one step further and elaborate on the next steps a startup should take to really do so.

Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
Good	The research process is done and explained in an excellent way. All statements, conclusions and recommendations are underpinned with the data collected by the students and/or referencing. The analysis is very substantial.	The research process is done and explained well. Most statements, conclusions and recommendations are underpinned with the data collected by the student and/or referencing. The analysis is substantial.	Weak problem analysis, research question not clear enough. Data collection and/or methodology is insufficient. Weak analysis, use of data from one dimension and not backed up.	Assumptions are backed up by some datapoints but I think the analysis could be further developed with more data.

Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
Room for improvement	Excellent ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to all stakeholders involved. The deliverable adds great value to the main stakeholders. Initial and creative channels have been actively used to share outputs and knowledge.	Good ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to stakeholders. The deliverable adds value to the company. Existing channels have been used to share knowledge.	The deliverable could have been better delivered to the stakeholders. The deliverable could have added more value, if better delivered. No active communication of outputs and knowledge.	Unfortunately, we did not get to trial this in the local Antler program. It would have been great to launch this in multiple locations to iterate on the session more thoroughly. Also due to the way the content of the session is structured in the deck, the success of the session can vary greatly depending on who is actively giving the talk.


Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
Excellent	Student is able to lead the project by themselves. Student is self-critical towards improvement and takes feedback to heart. Student deals with a diversity of stakeholders in an intercultural competent way. Hospitality mindset is seen in project or work in a very distinct way.	Student is able to lead the project with little help. Student is critical towards improvement and listens to feedback. Student deals with different stakeholders. Hospitality mindset can be seen.	Tasks performed are described and not critically analyzed. Student is not too critical towards own learning and can listen better to feedback. Student does not know how to deal with differences in stakeholders. Hospitality can be improved.	Varnavas lead this project almost entirely by himself with minimal input from me besides initial brainstorming. Varnavas takes feedback very seriously almost to a fault. He cares about others and has worked with almost 30 different cultures as part of the Antler program. The hospitality mindset is clear.

Comments on evaluation:			




I. Proof of dissemination

Well being and mental health Inbox x Print Share

 **Lene Haaland** <lene@antler.co>
to me ▾ Fri, May 21, 2:31 PM (5 days ago) Star Reply More

To whom it may concern,

My name is Lene Haaland Bjørndal and works as Program Manager for Antler Oslo.
I attended a global program call last week together with Varnavas Sisou. He took initiative to discuss implementing a session in all programs touching upon founders wellbeing. He provided us with a lot of important arguments and we had a great discussion with a lot of sharings. Building a company requires a lot of sacrifices for founders which often times can be quite challenging. We also work with founders across different cultures, and speaking openly about wellbeing and mental health is different from culture to culture. Therefore we were really happy that Varnavas got us aware of this. It led to a booster session within the Antler community about mental health and wellbeing at work.

//
Lene Haaland Bjørndal
Program Manager, Antler Norway

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PROOF OF WORDCOUNT

The screenshot displays the Microsoft Word interface with a document titled "Lycar Company Project". The ribbon shows the "Zotero" tab selected. The main area contains a grid of 154 small document thumbnails. The status bar at the bottom indicates "Page 47 of 154", "11906 of 3116 words", and "English (United Kingdom)". A red box highlights the word count "11906 of 3116 words".