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Journal of International Doctoral Research (JIDR), Volume 11, Number 1, 2024

Journal of International Doctoral Research

JIDR
Journal of International Doctoral Research

Volume 11 - Number 1 - December 2024

Journal of International Doctoral research

Volume 11, Number 1, 2024

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JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL DOCTORAL RESEARCH

Sponsored by the International Doctoral Research Centre

Volume 11, Number 1, 2024

Printed in the United States of America ISSN 2328-0832 ISBN 978-1-326-76309-1

INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

Vision:

The International Doctoral Research Centre was created over two decades ago, by likeminded researchers from across the globe who wish to promote excellence in research.

The IDRC journal consequently represents our multi-national effort to integrate various organizational disciplines into a coherent body of knowledge and facilitate the emergence of management and economics as an interdisciplinary domain of study. The journal seeks to provide a forum for interdisciplinary approaches and research traditions. We aim to showcase an international perspective that gives voice to doctoral and post-doctoral research and scholars in all regions of the world.

To submit a manuscript for blind peer review for publication to the JIDR, please forward to: submissions@jidr.online. Scan the QR code below to visit our website or go to www.jidr.online for more details on submission guidelines.

Regards,
Editorial Board of the JIDR directors of the IDRC Journal of International Doctoral Research

SCAN ME

INTRODUCTION

In 2024, Journal of International Doctoral Research (JIDR) celebrated the start of its second decade of publications. I had the honour of serving as a guest editor this year, and it was an enriching experience to collaborate with diverse group of researchers in the field. One can feel nothing else, but gratitude.

JIDR's second decade continues to uphold its mission of being a high-quality scientific outlet, primarily supporting young researchers across a wide range of academic fields. The journal's accreditations, such as inclusion in the Washington Academic Library Index and the Norwegian academic publishing system, reflect the ongoing commitment of the Editorial Board, reviewers, supporters, and advisors. To all of them, I extend my sincere gratitude for all hard work they have put in support of this journal.

While maintaining and expanding the journal requires significant effort, the initial creation of JIDR demanded even greater dedication. For this, I want to offer special recognition to the individuals who, over many years, ensured the journal's growth and its focus on addressing the needs of doctoral students. In particular, I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to Gillian Warner-Søderholm, Pat Joynt and Andy Bertsch for their exceptional contributions.

The world is increasingly challenging for today's organizations. Beyond geopolitical issues that threaten the stability of long-term planning, there are numerous other obstacles to navigate. The volatility of the global economy, coupled with rapid technological advancements such as AI-driven innovation, automation, and digital transformation, is reshaping industries and disrupting traditional business models. Evolving consumer preferences, particularly the growing

emphasis on sustainability, are compelling organizations to rethink their strategies and values. Furthermore, organizations must contend with a complex regulatory landscape, including stringent requirements for data privacy and environmental compliance. In this context, we need diverse voices in academia that can help organizations anticipate challenges, foster resilience, and innovate solutions to create sustainable and ethical growth pathways, by providing valuable insights and empirical evidence.

Therefore, we proudly present this issue of the journal and invite readers to engage with an exceptional array of articles that collectively showcase the breadth and depth of contemporary research. This edition embodies our commitment to fostering interdisciplinary dialogue, supporting emerging scholars, and addressing critical issues that resonate across academic and professional landscapes. This issue is opened with an article that underscores the significance of grit—a combination of perseverance and passion—as a critical factor in enhancing employee well-being. Findings of the article offer valuable insights for organizations seeking to cultivate resilient workforces in the face of ever-changing demands. Martin Stigmar contributes a thought-provoking piece, “Insights Shared by PhD Students Who Did Not Complete Their Doctoral Studies.” Drawing from the lived experiences of those who chose alternative paths, this article sheds light on the systemic and personal factors that influence doctoral completion rates. It serves as a timely reminder of the importance of creating supportive academic environments for emerging scholars. The destructive power of unethical leadership is expertly examined by Ilsé Strauss, Andrea R. Steele, and Vita Akstinaite. Their work highlights the cascading impact of morally disengaged leadership on organizational culture and ethical decision-making, offering

actionable recommendations to counter these dynamics. Economic and social equity take center stage in "The Influence of Financial Literacy on the Economic Well-Being of Tailenders in Iceland: A Qualitative Study" by Sigurdur Gudjonsson and Lilja Ómarsdóttir. This article illuminates the challenges faced by marginalized groups and underscores the transformative potential of financial literacy programs in fostering economic resilience and inclusion. Reflective Insights section presents perspective of Petter Gottschalk and delves into media ethics. This article critically examines the themes and biases that dominate sports journalism in the context of corruption trials, raising important questions about the role of media in shaping public perceptions of integrity in sports. Lastly, "Architectural Projects in Iceland: Creating Value at the Design Phase" address specific challenges that industry faces in Iceland, namely, cost overruns, fragmentation, and inconsistent processes, necessitating a focus on stakeholder-centric value creation.

Together, these articles represent a vibrant tapestry of research that addresses pressing societal challenges while inspiring dialogue and reflection. We extend our gratitude to the authors for their contributions and to our reviewers, whose expertise has been invaluable in maintaining the journal's standards.

We trust that this edition will spark new ideas, foster connections, and deepen understanding across disciplines. Happy reading!

Kind regards,

Guest Editor Prof. Inga Minelgaite, PhD.
School of Business, University of Iceland, Iceland

THE POWER OF GRIT: STRENGTHENING EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCE

Verena Karlsdóttir, School of Business, University of Akureyri, Iceland[1]

Friðrik Unnar Arnbjörnsson, Business Manager at Icelandair, Iceland[2]

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to deepen the understanding of the link between grit and well-being, particularly among students balancing both educational and work responsibilities. This study examines how personal factors, such as gender, age, and sleep habits, influence grit and well-being, focusing both on eudaimonic (long-term fulfilment and personal growth) and hedonic (short-term happiness) well-being. Two validated questionnaires were used to measure participants' grit and well-being: Angela L. Duckworth's *Grit Scale* and the *Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale* (SWEMWBS). Using a sample of university students, the findings reveal that grit is significantly more associated with eudaimonic well-being than with hedonic well-being suggesting that grit plays a key role in fostering long-term personal development and purpose rather than short-term pleasure. Demographic factors, such as gender, age, and sleep habits, showed little to no significant effect on grit or well-being, indicating these traits are relatively stable across different groups.

[1] Verena@unak.is

[2] Fua1@unak.is

Finally, the study highlights practical implications for employers, suggesting that strategies such as resilience training, professional development opportunities, and fostering a supportive work environment can help enhance employee well-being by cultivating grit. These insights can be used to design interventions aimed at improving job satisfaction, reducing employee turnover, and increasing productivity by promoting a culture of growth and purpose in the workplace. These insights are especially relevant for supporting new entrants into the labour market, helping to promote a culture of growth, purpose, and overall well-being in the workplace.

***Key Words*: Resilience, grit, well-being, eudaimonia, hedonia**

1. INTRODUCTION

The labour market in many countries is facing growing challenges related to mental health, stress, burnout, and mental disorders such as anxiety and depression which become increasingly prevalent among employees (Dobson & Schnall, 2018; Kuhn, 2013). The small island-state Iceland is here no exception (Embætti landlæknis, n.d.-b; VIRK, 2023). What has been prevalent in Iceland is that these challenges are particularly pronounced among young people who are entering the workforce (Einarsdóttir & Snorradóttir, 2020). The decline in mental well-being among Icelandic youth, especially those aged 20 and younger, has been studied in the findings of the *Directorate of Health*'s (*icel*. Embætti landlæknis) surveys on the health and well-being of Icelanders, which have been conducted since 2007. These surveys, alongside the increasing use

of antidepressants, recorded appointments with healthcare centers regarding anxiety and depressive disorders, and hospital admissions where these disorders are mentioned as causes, provide a clear picture of the worsening mental health crisis (Daníelsdóttir et al., 2017). Although the recent COVID-19 pandemic may have skewed data from the last few years, this trend has a longer record and cannot be solely attributed to the pandemic (Rugulies et al, 2023).

This challenge calls for immediate action to enhance well-being and mental health, where resilience[3] or grit – defined as the combination of perseverance and passion for long-term goals in the face of adversity (often also referred to as "consistency of interest") – could play a key role (Duckworth et al., 2007). Grit has been linked to increased well-being and improved mental health (Kaur, 2021; Salles et al., 2014) and understanding this relationship can inform the development of policies aimed at fostering positive behaviour and mental well-being in the workplace and at schools. Research indicates that grit is not only important for individual well-being but can also positively influence performance and productivity in both work and educational situations (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014; Fernández Martín et al., 2020).

This study is grounded in the concept of subjective well-being, which pertains to personal experiences and satisfaction (Diener et al., 2009). Subjective well-being is divided into two components: hedonic well-being, defined as personal happiness and satisfaction, and eudaimonic well-being, which refers to psychological well-being (McDowell, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

The purpose of this study is to deepen the understanding of the link between grit and well-being, particularly among students who are balancing educational and work responsibilities

[3] As based on the study of Cheng et al. (2023), the component of grit „perseverance of effort" and resilience are the same constructs, however, not the component „consistency of interest" and resilience.

at the same time. The study thereby seeks to examine how personal factors such as gender, age, and sleep habits influence grit and well-being, and how these relationships can provide direction on methods and strategies to strengthen these critical psychological components. These insights can be applied to both educational settings and workplace environments where e.g. employers can apply this knowledge to strengthen and develop workplace cultures and environments that encourage and support grit and well-being among employees. This outcome should foster overall mental health, reduce burnout, and enhance both job satisfaction and productivity.

In exploring these connections, the following research questions are put forward:

- *How does grit influence both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being?*
- *To what extent do personal factors such as gender, age, and sleep habits predict well-being and grit?*

Answers to these questions may provide valuable insights into the best ways to support and promote well-being and grit, both in educational settings and in the workplace, and how such initiatives can have positive impacts on individuals and society as a whole. Employers, in particular, could use these findings to develop and implement policies and strategies aimed at improving the work environment that foster resilience and improve overall employee well-being.

Studying thereby mental health and grit in Iceland provides helpful exploration for other nations due to the country's unique socio-economic and cultural context. As a small, highly developed island-state with a robust welfare system, Iceland serves as a microcosm for examining broader trends in mental health challenges, such as anxiety, depression, and burnout,

which are increasingly affecting workforces worldwide. What is more, the challenges faced by Iceland's younger generations, particularly those entering the job market, reflect global trends, making this study highly relevant for understanding how to support grit and well-being across different contexts. Insights gained from Iceland can inform policies not only in other Nordic welfare states but also in larger economies, as the mental health issues affecting workers in Iceland reflect growing international concerns about the sustainability of modern work environments. Thus, Iceland's experience can provide important guidance for employers, policymakers, and researchers, contributing to the development of strategies that promote long-term workforce well-being and productivity.

What follows this introduction, is the theoretical overview which outlines key concepts of this analysis, their interrelations, and the definitions used in this study. The third section presents the research methodology and data analysis, followed by the key findings in section four. Finally, the discussion integrates the study's key findings, examines their implications, and situates them within the broader context of existing literature on well-being and grit in the workplace. Finally, recommendations are presented to employers and managers on how to improve employee well-being, grit, and the overall work environment.

2. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

2.1 Well-being

Well-being is one of the fundamental pillars of health and is essential for individuals to effectively manage everyday stress, manage their work successfully, and contribute positively to

society (World Health Organization, 2022). From a broader perspective, enhancing well-being is not only beneficial for individuals but also economically advantageous for society and the economy as a whole.

Happiness or well-being can be further broken down into two key components: *hedonic* well-being, which focuses on personal happiness, pleasure, and satisfaction helping individuals cope with day-to-day challenges, and *eudaimonic* well-being, which pertains to self-discovery, life satisfaction, and pursuing a higher purpose or goal beyond oneself (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The prevailing contemporary definition of well-being posits that both these elements must be fulfilled to experience a holistic sense of well-being. This includes not only personal and emotional well-being but also a sense of purpose in life, authenticity, and personal growth or flourishing. For an individual to experience full well-being, these dimensions must be present (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Moreover, to assess well-being effectively, it is essential to measure both hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions to gain a holistic understanding of an individual's well-being (Ruggeri et al., 2020). This characterisation serves as the foundation for the present study.

Yet, the extent to which both forms are essential for a holistic well-being remains a subject to debate. Some researchers argue that achieving both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being is essential for a complete experience of subjective well-being (Keyes, 2007). Main criticism has revolved around the debate if both factors are too highly correlated and thus not too much distinct (Gallagher et al., 2009). What is more, contradictory findings exist regarding whether both dimensions are equally important, or if one can compensate for the other in specific contexts. For instance, in demanding or high-stress environments, such as workplaces with long

hours and high work autonomy, individuals might prioritise hedonic well-being, i.e. focusing on short-term rewards like financial compensation or leisure to recover from stress (Wiklund et al., 2019). In these settings, immediate pleasures might temporarily make up for a lack of eudaimonic well-being, allowing individuals to cope with their circumstances even if they do not feel long-term fulfilment (Stephan et al., 2020).

While many well-being models suggest an equal balance of both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, some studies question this emphasis. For example, Diener et al. (2018) argue that hedonic well-being, driven by momentary happiness and satisfaction, may be more relevant in direct, practical contexts, particularly when people face short-term pressures or need immediate emotional boosts. In such cases, hedonic well-being might be a more accessible and immediate source of psychological support, helping individuals maintain mental stability without necessarily needing to pursue larger, more abstract goals. In contrast, Ryff and Keyes (1995) promote the long-term benefits of eudaimonic well-being, suggesting that while hedonic pleasures can be fleeting, eudaimonia contributes to sustained mental health and resilience. Their research suggests that hedonic well-being alone may be not enough for overcoming life's deeper challenges, such as dealing with difficulty or maintaining purpose during difficult times. Individuals who pursue eudaimonic well-being are often better equipped to handle long-term stress and to experience personal growth, which can lead to a more continuing sense of life satisfaction.

In the context of work, these forms of well-being may manifest differently depending on factors such as education level, age, and occupation. For instance, individuals with higher

education levels often have greater opportunities to choose careers that align with their values and long-term goals, potentially leading to higher eudaimonic well-being (Savi Bahuguna, & Srivastava, 2023; Stephan et al., 2020). On the contrary, those with lower education levels may prioritize financial stability or job security, which may provide hedonic well-being but offer fewer opportunities for personal growth or fulfilment (Knudson, & Mazurik, 2020). Similarly, age plays a significant role in shaping well-being; younger workers may prioritize immediate job satisfaction (hedonic well-being), whereas older workers might seek jobs that provide a deeper sense of purpose and personal development (eudaimonic well-being) as they advance in their careers (Wilks, & Neto, 2013).

Moreover, workplace environments play a critical role in shaping the balance between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. In high-pressure work environments, where job demands are intense and financial compensation is emphasised, individuals may experience greater hedonic well-being (through material rewards such as financial incentives and temporary satisfaction) but may struggle to achieve eudaimonic well-being if they lack opportunities for personal growth, creativity, or purpose-driven work (Wallace, 2019). Conversely, occupations in sectors such as education, healthcare, or non-profit organisations may offer more possibilities for eudaimonic well-being due to their intrinsic focus on helping others or contributing to societal goals, even if they provide fewer rewards (Hayward, & Taylor, 2011; Meneghini & Colledani, 2024). This differentiation between job roles and their impact on well-being highlights the importance of considering occupational context when analysing well-being outcomes. Jobs with high financial incentives may be prioritize by people aiming for short-term satisfaction (hedonic

well-being), but without meaningful work or personal growth, employees may experience long-term dissatisfaction or burnout. This raises the question: Can grit help bridge this gap by enabling individuals to find fulfilment even in challenging roles, or is grit more effective in environments that already foster eudaimonic well-being?

Despite this, the perception of well-being remains highly subjective (Diener, Shigehiro, & Tay, 2018). Two individuals in the same role can experience completely different levels of satisfaction depending on personal values, support systems, workplace culture, and more. Understanding the factors that influence these differences – such as job satisfaction, social relationships, and work-life balance – can provide deeper insights into how well-being is shaped in various contexts.

Incorporating tools and scales for measuring well-being, such as the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS), introduces a crucial aspect of capturing the subjective nature of well-being. The WEMWBS (or the short version: SWEMWBS), designed to assess mental well-being by focusing on positive aspects of mental health, evaluates both hedonic and eudaimonic components. It provides valuable insight into an individual's emotional and psychological state by asking respondents to reflect on their recent experiences of happiness, purpose, and life satisfaction (Tennant et al., 2007). However, while tools like WEMWBS are widely used due to their robustness and ease of application, they also face challenges in reliably measuring well-being. One such challenge lies in the inherently subjective nature of well-being, which is influenced by personal perceptions, values, and cultural contexts. What one individual considers fulfilling or purposeful may differ significantly from another's experience, even within

similar environments. This subjectivity can lead to variability in responses, which may complicate the interpretation of results, especially when comparing different demographic groups, occupations, or cultural backgrounds (Tesch-Römer et al., 2008).

Additionally, temporal factors also affect well-being assessments. The dynamic and variable nature of well-being means that an individual's self-reported state can vary depending on when the assessment is conducted—whether during periods of high stress, life transitions, or moments of personal success (Pavot & Diener, 1993).

While the distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being has been well established in the literature (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Diener et al., 2018), several gaps remain that need further investigation. One key gap lies in understanding how these dimensions of well-being manifest in specific life transitions, such as the shift from education to the labour market. Although studies have explored well-being in work or educational settings separately, there is limited research on individuals who are simultaneously navigating both environments, particularly young adults who are juggling academic responsibilities while working part- or even full-time. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how grit and well-being are connected in individuals managing both work and education, a group often overlooked in current research.

2.1.1 Development of Well-Being Among Icelanders

In recent years, the well-being of Icelanders has fallen short of expectations. A survey conducted in 2022 revealed that only one in six stated experiencing a high level of well-being while about a third of Icelanders even rated their mental health as "fair" or "poor (Embætti landlæknis, 2023).

These findings are at odds with the fact that, during the same period, Iceland was ranked as the third happiest country in the world (Helliwell et al., 2023). This discrepancy raises questions about the relationship between general happiness and mental well-being, suggesting that while many Icelanders may consider themselves happy, a significant portion does not rate their mental health and well-being as satisfactorily positive. This incongruity calls for further inquiry into how mental well-being can be improved to better align with the nation's overall happiness ranking.

The governmental report *Mælikvarðar um hagsæld og lífsgæði* (Forsætisráðuneytið, 2019), on well-being and quality of life indicators outlines several factors that influence the well-being of the Icelandic population. For example, Iceland has one of the highest rates in Europe of people holding two or more jobs, and it ranks at the top for the proportion of individuals aged 20-64 who occasionally work evenings, as well as those working long hours on average. Iceland also has one of the highest employment participation rates among people aged 15-64. Particularly, the report highlights that in 2014, Iceland had the highest proportion of women aged 15-24 showing severe symptoms of depression, and it is generally believed that mental distress among young people is increasing. These factors may explain why one in four Icelanders frequently or very frequently experiences stress in their daily lives (Embætti landlæknis, n.d.-b).

These statistics suggest that Icelanders are a nation that works a lot and experiences high stress. If there are strategies that can help protect individuals from the negative consequences of stress and overwork, it would be highly beneficial to implement them broadly. These solutions

could considerably enhance the well-being and quality of life of Icelandic citizens, offering both personal and societal benefits.

2.2 Grit/Resilience

Grit is a personal trait that describes an individual's ability to face challenges, difficulties, and uncertainty with perseverance and optimism. It involves the willingness and capacity to continue pursuing one's goals despite obstacles or temporary setbacks. As described by Angela L. Duckworth 2016 in her book *Grit – The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (Duckworth, 2016), grit is not only about enduring hardship but also about maintaining a deep sense of passion and long-term commitment to one's goals.

Grit plays a crucial role in personal growth and development, but it is also a key factor in achieving success in education, work, and daily life. Duckworth argues that success in these areas often depends more on grit than on pure intelligence. In her 2007 study (Duckworth et al., 2007), she and her team developed a questionnaire to measure grit, focusing on sustained determination and long-term interest, and demonstrated that these traits were better predictors of success than intelligence alone.

Resilient or "gritty" individuals tend to be better equipped to handle changes and stressful situations. They view challenges as opportunities to learn and grow, rather than as impossible barriers. This adaptability and the ability to learn from experience contribute not only to greater well-being but also to better performance and success in various fields (Datu, Yuen, & Chen, 2018).

Crucially, grit or resilience is not an innate trait, but something that can be developed

over time. Growing grit involves setting realistic goals, maintaining a positive attitude, fostering strong relationships with others, and learning how to manage and overcome difficulties. This perspective opens up the possibility of teaching and adopting grit in both educational and professional settings (Duckworth, 2016).

The importance of grit in both education and the job market cannot be overstated. In educational settings, grit helps students to take on academic and social challenges, while in the workplace, it enhances the ability to cope with a rapidly changing environment and increasing demands to individuals. Thus, grit is not only vital for individuals striving to reach their personal goals, but it is also a key factor in building stronger, more adaptable communities. Duckworth's findings have been expanded upon by other researchers, with studies around the globe demonstrating that grit is a critical factor in achieving success in various domains, including education, sports, and the workplace (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014; Fernández Martín et al., 2020).

However, there has been some criticism of the concept of grit, as defined and used by Duckworth. One of the main critiques relates to the difficulty of reliably measuring grit, as some research methods and tools may oversimplify the concept, potentially leading to skewed results. For example, some studies have pointed out the risk of long-term commitment to unrealistic goals, which can result in burnout (Datu, 2020; Lucas et al., 2015; Moen & Olsen, 2020). Additionally, there are questions about distinguishing grit from other personality traits, such as conscientiousness (Schmidt et al., 2018). Critics have also highlighted the risk of placing too much emphasis on individual traits like grit for success, without acknowledging the significant

impact of external factors such as the education system, family support, and social circumstances, which all greatly influence an individual's success (Locks, 2023).

Research on grit or resilience is still relatively scarce in Iceland (Jónsson, 2019; Ragnarsdóttir et al., 2022). To date, the grit scale developed by Duckworth and Quinn (2009) has not been translated or widely used in Icelandic studies. This gap suggests a need for further research into grit in Iceland, both to better understand the concept in the local context and to develop tools that can effectively measure and promote grit among Icelandic citizens.

2.3 The Link Between Well-Being and Grit

Research into the relationship between well-being and grit emphasizes the critical role grit plays in mental health. For instance, a study by Kaur (2021) revealed that grit can have a significantly positive effect on psychological well-being. Individuals with high levels of grit tend to experience greater life satisfaction and reduced levels of anxiety. Similarly, research from South Korea shows that increased grit can lead to lower work-related stress and fewer symptoms of depression, highlighting the importance of grit for mental health in the workplace (Jung et al., 2023). Further studies have showed that grit acts as a protective factor against burnout in professional situations (Salles et al., 2014).

Duckworth and colleagues (2007) also reported a positive connection between grit, job performance, and academic achievement, particularly in the pursuit of personal goals. Duckworth (2016) has further noted that grit may be one of the most important personality traits for predicting long-term engagement in work, as gritty individuals are more likely to persevere in the face of challenges.

Additional studies, such as those by Datu (2020) and Kannangara et al. (2018), underline the wide-ranging benefits of grit for well-being. These studies link grit to increased happiness, self-esteem, a greater sense of purpose, and improved mental health overall. These findings suggest that grit not only enhances psychological well-being but also increases an individual's understanding and experience of life's purpose and meaning.

Altogether, this body of research demonstrates that grit is a key factor in overcoming adversity, whether in personal life, education, or the workplace. The importance of fostering grit within society is therefore unquestionable, as it benefits individual well-being and helps build stronger, healthier communities resulting in reduced burden on national healthcare systems.

While some studies have identified gender differences in grit and well-being (Tesch-Römer et al., 2008), the findings are often inconsistent. It is difficult to generalise that gender alone predicts grit or well-being without considering cultural and social factors that may influence these traits (Kaur, 2021). Additionally, the experience and maturity that come with aging can impact grit and well-being. In some cases, older individuals may exhibit greater grit due to their increased experience in dealing with setbacks in live (Carstensen et al., 2020; Sigmundsson et al., 2022). Moreover, healthy sleep is crucial for both mental and physical health. Adequate sleep can improve grit and well-being by reducing stress, enhancing mood, and boosting concentration, all of which are crucial for achievements in both education and in the workplace (Jackowska et al., 2015).

Studying the relation between grit and well-being is important in Iceland, where the rising occurrence of anxiety, stress, and depression – especially among younger age groups – is cause

for concern. Although research on the relationship between grit and well-being has been conducted in other countries, such as studies by Arya and Lal (2018), Datu (2020), Disabato et al. (2019), and Vainio and Daukantaitė (2016), there is a notable lack of such research in Iceland. Examining the relationship between well-being and grit in Iceland is crucial due to the country's rising mental health challenges, particularly among younger people. Despite Iceland's high global happiness rankings, increasing rates of anxiety, stress, and depression highlight a gap between societal well-being and individual mental health. Understanding how promoting grit could reverse these negative trends would not only improve the quality of life for Icelanders but also offer valuable insights for other nations facing similar challenges.

3. METHODOLOGY

In the following section the methodology of the study is presented which includes measurement tools, participants of the study, and data analysis.

3.1 Measurement Tools

The study utilized an online survey, distributed via email to students in February 2023 through the platform *QuestionPro*. The survey consisted of several standardized instruments, including the *Short Grit Scale* (Grit-S) developed by Duckworth and Quinn (2009) and the *Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale* (SWEMWBS) developed by Tennant et al. (2007), and further tested by the same group of researchers (Stewart-Brown et al., 2009).

The Grit-S scale contains ten items, rated on a five-point Likert-scale, assessing two main dimensions: consistency of interest (long-term passion) and perseverance of effort (persistence

despite obstacles). These dimensions are designed to measure both passion and determination, which are reliable predictors of academic and competitive success. The scale has been widely validated as a measure of personal grit and has been used in various international studies (Abu Hasan et al., 2022).

The SWEMWBS was developed to measure mental well-being across both eudaimonic (psychological fulfilment and purpose) and hedonic (personal happiness and satisfaction) dimensions. Although the original WEMWBS consists of 14 items, the SWEMWBS is a shorter version with seven items that retains a high level of reliability and validity. It has been previously used in Iceland in national health surveys and other local research (Arnarsson & Gestsdottir, 2022; Björnsdóttir et al., 2014). Despite being shorter, the SWEMWBS meets the Rasch model, which ensures that the questions provide consistent and interpretable results across different groups (da Rocha et al., 2013). Hedonic well-being in this study was measured using two items: "I have been feeling optimistic about the future" and "I have been feeling relaxed". These questions were designed to capture aspects of personal happiness and satisfaction, focusing on immediate emotional states that reflect the respondent's overall sense of ease and pleasure in their daily life. The remaining five questions measured eudaimonic well-being, such as engagement in activities and social connectedness. Additionally, demographic questions such as age, gender, and academic performance (measured as self-reported average grades from the fall semester of 2022) were included.

3.2 Participants

The study utilized a convenience sample consisting of students from two public universities in

Iceland. A total of 1,755 students received the survey, whereas most of the students were from the business department, humanities and social sciences department. Out of the total recipients, 234 students responded, yielding a response rate of 13.33%. Of these, 53% were business students, while 47% were sociology students.

Gender was categorized into three options: “Female” (1), “Male” (2), and “Other” (3). However, responses from the “Other” category, i.e. non-binary participants were excluded in the analysis due to small sample size which might result in unreliable or non-generalizable findings due to low statistical power. Overall, the sample consisted of 73.2% female and 26.8% male respondents. This reflects the gender distribution of the actual student population in Iceland, suggesting a representative proportion in line with the general demographic.

Age was distributed as follows: 45.5% of respondents were 25 years old or younger, 20.1% were between 26-30 years old, and 34.5% were 31 years old or older. Sleep patterns were also surveyed, with 43.6% reporting an average of seven hours of sleep per night, 21.4% reporting six hours or fewer, and 35% reporting eight or more hours of sleep.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 26. Reliability analysis was performed for both the grit and well-being scales using Cronbach’s alpha to assess the internal consistency of the scales. The Cronbach’s alpha for grit was 0.770, and for well-being, it was 0.805, which are both considered acceptable according to Tavakol and Dennick (2011). The items from the grit and well-being scales were summed and averaged, with the mean score for grit being 3.363 (minimum = 1.80; maximum = 4.80; SD = 0.567) and the mean score for well-being being 3.737

(minimum = 1.86; maximum = 5.00; SD = 0.558). In addition, well-being was further divided into eudaimonic and hedonic well-being for a more detailed analysis.

Three separate regression analyses were conducted to assess the predictors of well-being. Each analysis involved two models. The first model included demographic variables such as gender, age, academic performance, and sleep duration. In the second model, grit was added as a predictor. By comparing the adjusted R^2 across models, the relative importance of these factors in predicting the three different aspects of well-being could be assessed.

This methodology was designed to explore the complex relationship between grit, well-being, and demographic factors, with the aim of identifying actionable insights for improving mental well-being and grit among Icelandic students.

4. RESULTS

In this results section, we first present descriptive statistics, followed by correlation analysis between the various variables. Finally, regression analysis was used to determine which factors most strongly influence well-being.

4.1 Descriptive Results

The descriptive results for all grit-related items are presented in Table 1, ranked by highest mean score. Participants rated each item on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “Very much like me” (5) to “Not at all like me” (1). The highest average scores were for the items “I am a hard worker.” (M = 4.21, SD = 0.811) and “I am diligent. I never give up.” (M = 3.89, SD = 0.847). On the other end of the spectrum, the statement “I have difficulty maintaining my focus on

projects that take more than a few months to complete." has a lower mean score of 2.74 (SD = 1.159), suggesting that sustained long-term focus is less prevalent. Overall, the table provides insight into how participants rate themselves on various aspects of grit, with hard work and perseverance ranking higher than adaptability or long-term focus.

TABLE 1

Descriptive results for grit

Component	N	Mean	SD
I am a hard worker.	233	4.21	0.811
I am diligent. I never give up.	234	3.89	0.847
I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.	233	3.78	0.857
I finish whatever I begin.	234	3.62	0.978
Setbacks don't discourage me. I don't give up easily.	234	3.54	0.981
My interests change from year to year.	234	3.17	1.136
I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.	234	3.03	0.987
I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.	232	2.84	1.167
New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.	234	2.79	0.959
I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.	234	2.74	1.159

Similarly, the results for all well-being items are shown in Table 2, also ranked by highest mean score. Participants rated their responses on a scale from “Never” (1) to “Always” (5). The item “I’ve been able to make up my own mind about things.” received the highest average score (M = 4.08, SD = 0.725), while “I’ve been feeling relaxed” had the lowest average score (M = 3.25, SD = 0.937). Well-being was further divided into hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, with eudaimonic well-being generally scoring higher (M = 3.821, SD = 0.556) than hedonic well-being (M = 3.521, SD = 0.719).

TABLE 2

Descriptive results for well-being

Component	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**
I’ve been able to make up my own mind about things.	234	4.08	0.725
I’ve been dealing with problems well.	233	3.82	0.740
I’ve been feeling optimistic about the future	234	3.79	0.836
I’ve been feeling useful.	234	3.76	0.766
I’ve been feeling close to other people.	234	3.76	0.938
I’ve been thinking clearly.	234	3.71	0.782
I’ve been feeling relaxed.	233	3.25	0.937

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 3 presents the correlation between grit, overall well-being, hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, gender, age, average grade, and sleep (duration). Several significant correlations appear from the analysis. Firstly, grit exhibits a significant positive correlation with overall well-being (r = 0.479***), suggesting that individuals with higher grit levels tend to report greater well-being. When considering the two dimensions of well-being separately, grit is more strongly associated with eudaimonic well-being (r = 0.500***), which involves personal growth and fulfilment, compared to hedonic well-being (r = 0.331***), which relates to personal happiness and satisfaction. This indicates that grit contributes more to long-term purpose and meaning in life than to short-term pleasure.

In terms of academic performance, grit is weakly but significantly correlated with average grade (r = 0.185***), indicating that students with higher levels of perseverance and passion for long-term goals may achieve slightly better academic outcomes. Eudaimonic well-being also shows a moderate positive correlation with average grade (r = 0.131*), suggesting that students who find greater meaning and purpose in life may perform better academically. Additionally, sleep is negatively correlated with average grade (r = -0.148*), indicating that less sleep duration may be associated with slightly lower academic performance.

However, grit shows no significant correlation with gender, age, or sleep duration. Overall, the table highlights how grit plays a significant role in well-being, especially eudaimonic well-being, and suggests connections between personal traits, well-being, and academic outcomes.

TABLE 3

Correlation between variables

		Mean	SD	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	**Grit**	3.363	0.567	230							
2	**Well-being**	3.737	0.558	232	.479***						
3	**Hedonia**	3.521	0.719	233	.331***	.853***					
4	**Eudaimonia**	3.821	0.556	233	.500***	.963***	.679***				
5	**Gender**	1.268	0.444	228	-0.049	0.020	0.111*	-0.027			
6	**Age**	3.000	1.267	229	-0.031	-0.084	-0.103	-0.071	-.195***		
7	**Average grade**	5.349	1.539	229	.185***	0.113*	0.036	.131*	-.172***	.144*	
8	**Sleep**	4.150	1.023	234	0.069	0.032	0.039	0.029	-0.044	-.148**	.142**

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed test).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed test).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.1 level (two-tailed test).

4.3 Regression analysis

Regression analysis results for general well-being, hedonic well-being, and eudaimonic well-being are displayed in Table 4. These models reveal that grit is the primary predictor of well-

being in all three models. When comparing the models, it is clear that grit is a stronger predictor of eudaimonic well-being, explaining nearly 22% of the variance (β=0.463***), compared to around 11% of the variance for hedonic well-being (β=0.426***). None of the other variables in Model 2 were statistically significant. These findings suggest that grit plays a critical role in predicting well-being, particularly eudaimonic well-being, which is closely tied to a sense of purpose and personal growth. While hedonic well-being is also influenced by grit, the relationship is weaker. The lack of significant relationships between well-being and factors such as gender, age, or sleep duration indicates that these demographic variables have limited impact on well-being within this sample, emphasizing the central importance of grit in fostering mental well-being.

TABLE 4

Multivariate regression models to predict well-being

	Variable	**General well-being**			**Hedonic well-being**			**Eudaimonic well-being**		
	Model	**B**	**β**	**SE**	**B**	**β**	**SE**	**B**	**β**	**SE**
1	**Constant**	25.762***		1.845	3.339***		0.343	3.824***		0.262
	Gender	0.027	0.003	0.606	0.146	0.090	0.112	-0.053	-0.043	0.086
	Age	-0.351*	-0.115	0.215	-0.060	-0.105	0.040	-0.049	-0.112	0.030
	Average grade	0.260	0.104	0.174	0.018	0.038	0.032	0.0415*	0.117	0.025
	Sleep	-0.014	-0.004	0.263	0.014	0.020	0.049	-0.005	-0.009	0.037

2	**Constant**	16.090***		2.102	2.026***			2.404***		0.296
	Gender	0.145	0.017	0.542	0.161	0.100	0.100	-0.036	-0.029	0.076
	Age	-0.281	-0.092	0.192	-0.050	-0.088	-0.088	-0.038	-0.087	0.027
	Average grade	0.059	0.023	0.158	-0.009	-0.020	-0.020	0.013	0.036	0.022
	Sleep	-0.073	-0.019	0.235	0.007	0.009	0.009	-0.015	-0.027	0.033
	Grit	3.159***	0.455	0.425	0.429***	0.331	0.331	0.463***	0.468	0.060
1	**R^2**	0.021			0.023			0.024		
	Adjusted R^2	0.003			0.005			0.006		
	F-value	1.140			1.302			1.321		
2	**R^2**	0.220			0.129			0.235		
	Adjusted R^2	0.202			0.109			0.217		
	F-value	12.172***			6.415***			13.334***		

*$P \leq 0.1$. ** $p \leq 0.05$. *** $p \leq 0.01$

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored the link between grit and well-being, identifying key predictors of both components and examining how employers might leverage these insights to improve workplace environments.

The findings revealed that grit is a significant predictor of well-being, especially eudaimonic well-being, which emphasises long-term fulfilment, personal growth, and

meaningful social connections. On the other hand, while grit also positively influences hedonic well-being which relates to short-term happiness and pleasure, the effect is weaker. Hedonic well-being is more immediate and centred around emotional states like satisfaction and enjoyment, which are less directly influenced by grit. Grit tends to align more with enduring traits that foster deeper life satisfaction, meaning that the impact on hedonic well-being is present but not as pronounced.

What is more, the results showed that grit and well-being were not correlated to gender, age, and sleep duration, and only to a little extent connected to average student grade. These findings suggest that grit and well-being are relatively stable traits across different demographic groups. Therefore, demographic factors do not serve as strong predictors of grit or well-being in this study. Even though certain situational or environmental factors might influence how grit is exposed, the principal trait of grit remains stable across diverse populations (Credé, Tynan, & Harms, 2017). Similarly, gender differences in grit have often been found to be insignificant, even when measured in various educational and work-related contexts (Clark & Malecki, 2019). Contrary, well-being is more fluctuating and is thus altering more based on demographic factors such as age and gender. Hedonic well-being, in particular, tends to decline with age, while eudaimonic well-being often increases as individuals focus more on meaningful, purposeful activities later in life (Ryff, 1989; Hansen & Blekesaune, 2022). However, the findings in our study suggest that both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being were not significantly correlated with age, gender, or sleep duration.

The marginal link with student grades could also reflect ground for future research suggesting that well-being and academic achievement are not as closely linked as once thought, particularly for eudaimonic well-being. While academic success can contribute to short-term happiness (i.e. hedonic well-being), it doesn't always guarantee long-term personal growth and fulfilment, which are key components of eudaimonic well-being (Datu et al., 2018).

The lack of a significant relationship between sleep duration and grit or well-being is surprising, as previous studies have highlighted the importance of sleep for mental health. Research has found strong connections between poor sleep quality and lower levels of hedonic well-being, including increased negative affect and reduced life satisfaction (Dinges et al., 1997; Totterdell et al., 1994). However, it is possible that sleep quality, rather than sleep duration as measured in this study, plays a more critical role in well-being and grit. Quality of sleep may influence one's emotional regulation and resilience more than the quantity of sleep, thus explaining the weak correlation between sleep duration and the study's variables (Pilcher, Ginter, & Sadowsky, 1997).

Overall, the study emphasizes that grit, particularly its influence on eudaimonic well-being, can be a valuable tool for improving workplace environments. Employees with higher levels of grit are more likely to experience greater fulfilment, personal growth, and long-term satisfaction in their work. Importantly, the results demonstrate that eudaimonic well-being has a much stronger connection to grit than hedonic well-being, which is more associated with short-term satisfaction and pleasure. Therefore, one should not solely focus on "entertainment or amusement" as ways of short-term satisfaction, such as immediate financial rewards or

superficial work incentives to promote well-being of employees. These offer short-term satisfaction but may not contribute significantly to employees' deeper sense of well-being. In contrast, fostering a sense of purpose and opportunities for personal development can create an environment where employees thrive both personally and professionally. For example, offering training programs that lead to certifications or providing clear pathways for career advancement can foster long-term employee satisfaction by aligning personal growth with organisational goals.

Given the stability of grit and well-being across demographic factors, these traits may be better targets for individual-level interventions rather than demographic-specific strategies. For instance, resilience-building programs aimed at enhancing grit and fostering long-term well-being might focus on personal development rather than tailoring interventions to gender or age-specific groups. Therefore, these findings reinforce the importance of creating workplace environments that provide opportunities for meaningful growth rather than simply focusing on short-term incentives. Offering employees chances for career development such as specialised training or leadership opportunities, not only enhances their professional skills but also improves their self-esteem, confidence, and overall well-being. Such initiatives could include programs that involve professional certifications or other formal recognitions, which build both competence and self-confidence. This approach results in happier, more resilient, and productive employees.

Understanding how grit relates to well-being provides valuable insights for employers who wish to design interventions that boost both grit and well-being among their workforce.

Some actionable strategies include offering resilience training, creating goal-setting frameworks, and ensuring that employees feel valued for their contributions. This, in turn, can increase eudaimonic well-being by helping employees see their roles as integral to the organization's success. When employees feel that their work has purpose, their grit and overall well-being tend to improve (Soren & Ryff, 2023).

Moreover, a healthy work environment that promotes both mental and physical well-being is essential. Implementing initiatives such as flexible working hours, access to wellness or health programs (like exercise, meditation, or mindfulness), and dedicated rest areas could significantly improve job satisfaction, reduce turnover, and boost productivity (Cooper & Barton, 2016; Halling Ullberg et al., 2023; Micklitz et al., 2021). Offering structured opportunities for recovery and regeneration is critical in preventing burnout, particularly in highly demanding jobs.

The findings of this study align with existing research on grit and well-being, supporting the idea that grit is essential for personal and professional growth (Duckworth et al., 2007). Moreover, this study extends earlier work by showing that grit is more strongly tied to eudaimonic well-being than hedonic well-being, reinforcing theories that personal growth and fulfilment are more enduring contributors to overall life satisfaction than short-term pleasures. These results are consistent with other research that emphasize the protective role of grit against burnout and stress in challenging environments (Salles et al., 2014). However, as this study was a cross-sectional study, causal relationships between grit and well-being cannot be definitively

established. Longitudinal studies would be necessary to explore how grit and well-being evolve over time, particularly in dynamic work environments.

Employers can use these insights to foster grit and well-being in their organisations, contributing not only to higher employee satisfaction but also to improved productivity. Encouraging a growth mindset, where employees are supported in pursuing long-term goals and facing challenges with grit, is critical. Employers should also focus on providing environments that nurture employees' eudaimonic well-being through opportunities for growth, recognition of contributions, and fostering meaningful connections among employees. Helping employees to see their work as a critical part of the organisation's overall mission, companies and other organisations can promote greater job satisfaction and retention.

However, not only employers can promote grit and well-being: also national governments adopting special regulations or policies can play an important role. As such, in recent years the Icelandic government implemented shorter working weeks and increased parental leave to a total of 12 months. As a result, working weeks were shortened from 40 hours to 36 at many workplaces. Outcomes show a positive effect on well-being at work and daily life, and employees state e.g. reduced burnout as well as diminished mental and physical stress symptoms (Félagsmálaráðuneytið, 2019). Therefore, these policies may reduce the immediate stressors associated with long working hours, contributing to higher hedonic well-being. At the same time, by encouraging work-life balance and supporting personal development, these policies likely contribute to eudaimonic well-being, fostering a deeper sense of purpose and fulfilment among employees (Soni & Bakhru, 2019).

Although this study offers important insights, some limitations should be acknowledged. One notable issue is the low response rate, even though the survey was sent to a sufficiently large sample. Future research could focus on improving response rates through incentives like lotteries or other rewards to ensure higher participation. Additionally, while this study used a convenience sample of university students – many of whom are already in the workforce – it is important to recognise that the findings may not fully generalise to other populations. For instance, employees who have been in the same job for several years may experience different trajectories in their well-being, such as transitioning from initial happiness to burnout (e.g. job-related burnout). Future studies should expand the sample to include a broader range of workforce with longer tenure, as well as those across different sectors.

In conclusion, this study contributes valuable insights into the relationship between grit and well-being, particularly within the context of the workplace. By fostering grit and focusing on long-term well-being, employers can create environments that enhance both personal and organisational outcomes, leading to more resilient, satisfied, and productive employees.

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INSIGHTS SHARED BY PHD STUDENTS WHO DID NOT COMPLETE THEIR DOCTORAL STUDIES

Martin Stigmar, Centre for Teaching and Learning, Malmö University, Sweden[4]

ABSTRACT

This study aims to generate knowledge around why some doctoral students do not complete their studies. Interviews were conducted with six informants to explore the reasons Swedish doctoral students give for non-completion. The study employs a qualitative approach based on a reflexive thematic analysis. It reveals ten reasons for non-completion: problematic supervisor-supervisee relationship, unclear requirements, cultural outsider perspective, noncommitted main supervisor, lost motivation, adversarial private circumstances, lack of work-life balance, organizational deficiencies, conflict with senior researchers, and incompatible interests. The reasons can be categorized into two main groups: those related to the university and those pertaining to the doctoral students. The overall conclusion is that non-completion is multifactorial, implying that supervisors need a wider perspective to resolve the problem of non-completion. Future research should explore supervisors' perspectives on non-completion.

***Key Words*: Non-completers, doctoral studies, multi-factorial**

[4] Martin.stigmar@mau.se

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article, non-completion refers to the failure to finish doctoral studies within a stipulated time frame due to either dropping out or taking an extended break from studies. The non-completion of doctoral studies not only poses a cost risk for universities worldwide but also has consequences for all actors involved. Namely, non-completion entails financial costs and waste of resources for both universities and funding agencies. It also involves personal costs for students and supervisors, such as anxiety, time loss, and feelings of defeat. Therefore, efforts must be made to identify the causes and minimize the occurrence of non-completion.

Previous research presents several causes for the interruption of doctoral studies, including social, financial, and labor-market factors (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, 2008; 2012). Research also indicates that the main cause for dropping out is a malfunctioning relationship between students and supervisors (Corcelles et al., 2019). Likewise, the primary factor reported in Sweden for not completing doctoral studies is an inadequate supervisee-supervisor relationship (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, 2012). Moreover, Kulikowski et al. (2019) and Capacent (2007) emphasize the role of a supportive social relationship between doctoral students and their supervisors. A literature review by Sverdlik et al. (2018) also supports the importance of establishing a reliable relationship between supervisor and supervisee. Generally, supervision is perceived as helpful in facilitating professional development; nonetheless, doctoral students are likely to encounter incompetent supervisors or supervisors who cause them distress or even psychological harm (Bang et al., 2014). Thus, a problematic relationship with supervisors increases the risk of doctoral student attrition

(Corcelles et al., 2019). A broader discussion on inadequate supervision and its impact on doctoral student satisfaction is internationally pertinent.

Nevertheless, doctoral students often drop out of their programs without providing an explanation (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Moreover, there has been a lack of qualitative studies on the voices and experiences of international students who discontinue doctoral research degrees (Phan, 2024). Supervisors worldwide, regardless of their field, should understand the root causes of non-completion to develop ethical and cost-effective practices to mitigate this problem. Therefore, to increase higher education institutions' readiness to provide supportive supervision, this study explores reasons behind the non-completion of doctoral studies in Sweden. The main contribution of this study is to provide case-based knowledge around general reasons for the non-completion of doctoral studies. Its findings will enable doctoral students as well as supervisors to reflect on how they can act to limit the risk for non-completion. In addition, studies that include those who have not completed their studies provide a more holistic picture of career trajectories (Ahmad, 2017); the findings of this study will aid in this endeavor. While this study focuses on Sweden, its findings are applicable to supervisors worldwide seeking insights into reasons for doctoral non-completion and the significance of fostering strong supervision relationships to mitigate attrition.

1. Aim, Research Question, and Scope

This study aims to investigate the reasons behind the non-completion of doctoral studies in Sweden from the students' perspective. Therefore, it poses the following research question: What reasons do students provide for failing to complete their doctoral studies?

This study specifically highlights the perspective of doctoral students (not supervisors) regarding non-completion. To elucidate students' perspective in a Swedish context, Malmö University was selected as a case study. Further, the study is exploratory; therefore, it is not limited to aspects such as students' ethnicity, gender, or disabilities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To explore existing studies on the non-completers of doctoral studies (i.e., research focusing on the students), I conducted a search in the Educational Resource Information System (ERIC), the world's most widely used online database of education-related literature. Searching peer-reviewed journals using the search string "non-completers of doctoral studies" resulted in three articles. The first article was a Vietnamese case study by Phan (2024) that focused on international PhD students and their reasons for non-completion. The study identified five intersecting themes within three structural aspects: relational aspects (linked/independent lives), temporal aspects (the interplay of human lives and historical times, the timing of lives), and developmental aspects (diversity in life courses, developmental risk and protection). The second study aimed to identify dropping out factors in the field of education (Leijen & Remmik, 2016). Leijen and Remmik (2016) found that dropping out from doctoral studies was connected to "student's personal factors (e.g. insufficient knowledge and skills, lack of interest, family demands, lack of finances), supervisory arrangements (e.g. supervisor's lack of support), and by other factors contributing to the wider learning community (community's support, substantive

monitoring of the studies)" (p. 140). In the third study, Devos et al. (2017) compared completers and non-completers, and their results show that doctoral students who feel that they are moving forward, without experiencing too much distress, on a research project that makes sense to them to a greater extent tend to complete their doctoral studies. I will return to some of these studies in the discussion section, where I compare their findings to those of this study.

The search showed limited exiting research focusing on non-completers. Therefore, I decided to include the relevant findings from a previous literature review exploring the positive and negative factors influencing doctoral students (Stigmar, 2023). The review involved two searches in ERIC. The first search was conducted in January 2022 and targeted factors negatively influencing the supervision relationship in doctoral education, yielding 13 relevant peer-reviewed articles from 2010 to 2021 available in full text. Each item underwent scrutiny based on title and summary, resulting in the exclusion of four articles due to misalignment with the review's focus. According to the review findings, the positive factors for doctoral students include a supportive supervisor relationship and quality supervision. A supportive supervisor relationship impacts students' satisfaction, resilience, and academic achievement (McCray & Joseph-Richard, 2020; Sparks & Chang, 2021). Quality supervision involves feedback, frequent meetings, and mentor availability. In addition, socialization programs and mentoring are crucial because they support student well-being, psychological maturity, work-life balance, motivation, and self-discipline (McBrayer, et al., 2021). Importantly, the findings indicate that the interaction of personal, environmental, professional, and institutional factors influences program completion.

A subsequent search was conducted on February 1, 2022, to identify the factors positively influencing doctoral education supervision. This search yielded 50 relevant peer-reviewed articles from 2016 to 2021 available in full text. A screening process based on title and abstract excluded 32 articles not aligned with the review's focus and scope. The remaining 18 articles were further evaluated, and 10 were selected for inclusion in the study. These are the key findings: The negative factors affecting doctoral studies include cultural differences, language barriers, and non-academic backgrounds. Moreover, poor socialization and understanding of the doctoral program can hinder success, as can imbalances between teaching and research (Jucks & Hillbrink, 2017). Temporary and insecure doctoral employment, along with gender-related barriers, also impact performance.

3. A SWEDISH CASE: MALMÖ UNIVERSITY

Malmö University in Sweden, in 2024, has approximately 24,000 students, including 283 doctoral students. According to Swedish regulations, doctoral students have the right to supervision during their postgraduate training, and Malmö University provides 80 hours per year for full-time doctoral studies. The Doctoral Support unit at Malmö University (2020) provides students with assistance, particularly regarding conflicts with supervisors, assistant supervisors, or former supervisors. The unit's function complies with international findings indicating that a dysfunctional supervisor relationship is a primary cause of non-completion. Doctoral students at

Malmö University have reported a satisfactory dialogue with their supervisors. Nonetheless, to avoid non-completion, the Malmö University guidelines for doctoral studies stress the following:

> "In order to achieve the goals for the doctoral education, it is emphasized that newly admitted doctoral students must be offered a systematic introduction to their doctoral education and to their workplace, that the supervision must be of high quality and have sufficient scope, and that access to relevant courses must be good". (Holmström, 2024, p. 18)

Accordingly, Malmö University offers doctoral students an introductory course and requires supervisors to take part in a supervision training course.

3.1 Introductory Course for Doctoral Students

The introductory course at Malmö University aims to provide doctoral students with essential information about their roles, research environments, and the university's mission regarding postgraduate research. It also facilitates networking among new doctoral students, fostering their integration into the research community. The course covers various topics, including expectations, supervision dynamics, Malmö University's goals and policies for postgraduate research, generic doctoral courses, career support, study abroad opportunities, and library resources as well as experiences shared by current doctoral students.

3.2 Supervisor Training Course

Additionally, Malmö University offers a compulsory supervisor training course to address the lack of formal training among supervisors, as highlighted by research. Researchers have emphasized the significance of preparing senior academics for their supervisory roles (e.g., Kulikowski et al., 2019), and they have stressed the need to professionalize supervisor training processes in order to enhance supervision quality and efficacy (e.g., Wisker & Claesson, 2013). Accordingly, introducing a mandatory supervisor training course at Malmö university is in line with research recommendations. The training course at Malmö University aims to provide supervisors with the necessary skills and awareness to support doctoral students effectively and to mitigate non-completion issues. The course spans three and a half weeks of full-time commitment, and it is a prerequisite for promotion to associate professor. It delves into various aspects of supervision (including regulatory frameworks, power dynamics, and effective strategies) through lectures, seminars, group discussions, and case studies. The course covers essential topics such as doctoral studies perspectives, learning objectives, thesis quality, supervision organization, legal considerations, equality, and library services. Moreover, the course problematizes non-completion and invites critical discussions about how the risk of dropping out can be limited.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study was driven by the research question, "what reasons do students provide for failing to complete their doctoral studies?" To answer the question, I collected data by conducting interviews with students from Malmö University who did not complete their doctoral studies. Non-completers meeting specific criteria (e.g. being inactive during several years) were contacted via email for participation. All the informants were women. Their age at the start of their doctoral studies ranged between 31 and 43, with an average of 38. Two of the informants represented media and communication, and the rest came from care science, mathematics didactics, pedagogy, and urban studies. The study pace on the doctoral degree varied between 50% and 100%. Most of the informants dropped out or took a break after a couple of years of doctoral studies, with the shortest study period lasting two months and the longest ten years. To guarantee confidentiality, full descriptions of the informants are not presented.

The informants were interviewed individually. The interviews were conducted via Zoom, and they lasted for one to two hours. The interviews were structured using a question guide that focused on four key areas: background factors, supervisor relationships, motivation, and work environment. The informants were provided with the interview questions in advance to allow for reflection and preparation. The interviews were recorded after the informants expressed informed consent. Thereafter, they were transcribed in preparation for analysis.

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the process described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis offers flexibility while following a well-

established process involving iterative phases such as data familiarization, code generation, theme identification, and report production (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022). Thematic analysis appeared to be validated research approach as it has been previously used in studies on students' recollections of factors related to non-completion (Leijen & Remmik, 2016). Therefore, it has been used in this study to uncover patterns in the qualitative data to gain an understanding of the informants' perspectives on why they did not complete their doctoral studies.

Throughout the analysis, I as researcher remained mindful of my own subjectivity, seeking to avoid bias and overinterpretation. Additionally, I considered the theoretical flexibility of a reflexive thematic analysis, acknowledging that subjectivity is not merely a problem to be controlled but is instead the primary tool for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Thus, subjectivity was acknowledged as omnipresent, both in the researcher and in the informants. This approach aimed to mitigate holistic fallacy, as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), by anchoring interpretations among all informants and actively involving them in the analysis process. Further, to enhance rigor, all informants had the opportunity to review and validate the interpretations derived from their interviews twice (which they all used), ensuring accuracy and alignment with their perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

5. RESULT

This section presents the results of the analysis. For each informant, the identified themes are

presented, supported with excerpts from the interviews, and complemented by their suggested solutions. Thereafter, the themes are categorized, compared with those identified in previous literature (see the Literature Review section) and examined. Overall, the amalgamation of several factors contributed to the informants' decision to not complete their doctoral studies.

5.1 Informant 1

The analysis revealed three themes in the reasons leading the first informant to leave their doctoral studies: (i) problematic supervisor-supervisee relationship, (ii) unclear requirements, and (iii) cultural outsider perspective.

The first theme concerns the relationship between the doctoral student and the supervisors. Several issues contributed to making this relationship problematic for the informant. The informant said she had no "possibility to influence the choice of supervisor." She requested a specific person as her main supervisor, but as she understood, the suggested supervisor had no time. However, the most severe problem in her relationship with the supervisors was that the informant felt the feedback was insufficient and difficult to understand: "I was told it was good. I kept asking, am I doing things right? Where am I? It took me time to understand the feedback and no support was given to understand the feedback." The informant did not feel that she received encouragement from her supervisors. She reasoned that perhaps the supervisors were trying to "maintain authority. Too much encouragement could be understood as being soft as a supervisor."

The second theme, unclear requirements, refers to the doctoral student's inability to understand what is expected of them. After supervision meetings, the informant "always came away with the feeling I should have done more." She felt that she was not meeting standards. The unclear requirements made her "unsure what is expected of me. What matters? What is enough? I gave up on a system that did not respond."

The third theme specifically concerns doctoral students who are considered "cultural outsiders." In this context, a cultural outsider is a doctoral student who has a different cultural background due to being born and raised in a country other than Sweden. The informant originally came from another country and felt uncomfortable in the university; specifically, she experienced cultural exclusion as an outsider. According to the informant, no introduction to the doctoral program was offered prior to its commencement; instead, she was immediately invited to teach: "I felt lost. When it came to presenting my work within the walls of the university, I was not confident. I just didn't fit in." She added, "I had a feeling that there were things happening around me that I had no clue about." She criticized herself by asking, "Is it me who is limiting the conversation? I didn't do enough to find my way around?"

To overcome these problems, the informant needed a supervision relationship where the supervisor explained how the feedback should be handled and where the supervisor supported the doctoral student. The informant expressed that she had needed support in translating meaningful discussions into her own research project. She also asked for clear, straightforward, and critical feedback. In addition to feedback, clear information and instructions are necessary,

particularly for cultural outsiders. Doctoral students who have a cultural background other than that of the country where they receive their doctoral education need extra care from the supervisor and a proper introduction to the work environment.

5.2 Informant 2

Three themes emerged during the analysis of the second interview: (i) noncommitted main supervisor, (ii) lost motivation, and (iii) adversarial private circumstances.

An uncommitted main supervisor is one who prioritizes tasks other than supervision. This theme was evident in the second informant's narrative. Similar to the first informant, the second one was also not allowed to influence the choice of supervisor. The informant did not feel supported by the main supervisor, who was not feeling well and had private problems. Moreover, there were constant setbacks because the supervisor found new things to change. On the other hand, she perceived the two co-supervisors as more committed. The informant said the three supervisors' feedback was of a conflicting nature. In addition, none of the supervisors were physically present at the university. These aspects culminated in the theme of a noncommitted main supervisor, which was amplified by issues related to the co-supervisors.

Lost motivation, referring to the doctoral student losing the desire and motivation to work on their thesis, was another theme that emerged in the informant's narrative. For the second informant, the lost motivation was influenced by several factors. One big factor was the lack of supervisor involvement. The informant also lacked encouragement and felt that her texts were

not perceived as good enough. She expressed self-criticism, saying she did not think she was outspoken enough with her supervisors: “Now they say so, then I have to do so. I didn’t say what I thought.” Another factor was the fact that she was not physically present at the university, which made her feel alone; she missed having informal meetings with the supervisors and other doctoral students. Consequently, she lost interest in her thesis, did not find the studies enjoyable, and became unmotivated.

The third theme that contributed to non-completion is adversarial private circumstances, which include having another job, dealing with illness, or having a death in the family. In this informant’s case, she worked full-time as a manager in addition to her doctoral studies. The addition of illnesses and a deceased family member contributed to an unsustainable work and life situation. These circumstances led her to take two extended breaks during her doctoral studies.

The support that this informant required was that “the supervisors would have been more involved in the process. The supervisors were not up to date on my manuscript. I wanted more predictability.”

5.3 Informant 3

The third informant’s narrative displayed two themes: (i) lack of work-life balance and (ii) adversarial private circumstances.

In the context of doctoral studies, lack of a work-life balance occurs when the combination of doctoral studies, other work tasks, family life, and personal life becomes too

much. This was one of the main reasons the third informant did not complete her studies. The puzzle of life was difficult to put together and she ended up suffering: “I can’t sacrifice my health and family, it’s not worth it.” She found it difficult to have the family in one place, work in another (teaching in compulsory school), and study in a third place, especially when “At the same time, my husband got the opportunity to study further in another place it didn’t work out.” This situation also prevented her from being in situ at the university: “I like to be on site at my jobs. I don’t like working from home. Then, I miss part of the everyday activities. Contacts and the social aspect are lost when you are not there. Difficult to build a network when you are not there.”

The combination of work and studies and the constant travel made her feel insufficient at home, with her doctoral studies, and with her pupils in compulsory school. Thus, the lack of balance created a stressful situation that affected her studies: “Graduate school became stressful, I felt like I was falling behind and out of sync, I constantly felt like I was falling behind.” The lack of work-life balance in this case also appears to intersect with the personal circumstances theme; that is, not only does the informant has a job in addition to her studies, the lack of balance contributed to mental health issues.

> *Perfectionism, that’s me. Therefore, there was an internal conflict. When you feel that you cannot perform as well as you would like, it affects you as a person. There was a collision. Good enough does not exist in my world. If you must do it, it has to be 100%. I would have been able to do it, but I feel like I can’t do it as well as I*

would like to.

Here, the informant's perfectionism in combination with the lack of work-studies-life balance became a cause for stress. The informant has previous experience with being burned out and was careful not to end up there again. This personal experience with stress and susceptibility to burnout in combination with other illness in the family constituted adversarial private circumstances that contributed to her decision to drop out of her doctoral studies.

Regarding the support that the informant had needed, it was not something that could have been provided by the university or supervisors: "I don't think any support would have helped, it was about factors that were outside. Pulling the family up and selling the new house was not a realistic option."

5.4 Informant 4

For the fourth informant, the analysis identified two themes: (i) Conflict between the doctoral student and a senior researcher and (ii) organizational deficiencies.

Conflicts may occur between senior researchers (other than the supervisor) and doctoral students regarding the students' expectations and possibilities to influence the academic learning environment. According to the fourth informant, many doctoral students in her faculty "felt very controlled and pressured, and critical voices were not asked for." The informant felt that she was never given the opportunity to express her opinions and thus influence the doctoral program; instead, everything was predetermined. Once the informant expressed her will and criticized a

senior researcher's leadership and style, this resulted in conflict with the senior researcher, and she was perceived as troublesome. According to the informant, the supervisors dominated the seminars, and the doctoral students were expected to sit there to be formed and schooled: "It was not a pleasant atmosphere. It is a process to enter the academy. Entering the academy is a process, but the doctoral students were not given time for the process."

Another reason behind non-completion was covered under the theme organizational deficiencies, which included power struggles between senior researchers and lack of academic freedom for doctoral students. Internal disputes between senior researchers not only occurred but spilled over into the environment of the seminars, but they were largely unspoken and therefore difficult to understand for the doctoral students: "No one explained the academic game and power struggles. The PhD students had to figure it out themselves. The new PhD students felt stupid." Furthermore, the informant complained about the lack of freedom. She stressed that the doctoral students "did not want to be controlled by the research school or by people connected to it." However, some professors had a lot of power in their institution, and the governance of the institution combined with the extensive power of some professors led to a lack of academic freedom and autonomy for the doctoral students.

Organizational deficiencies also concerned the organizational clash between different actors within academia. There was an organizational clash between the research school idea and the doctoral students' desire to remain in the academy." According to the informant, the university presented the students with double messages. On the one hand, "the university wanted

to bring in research-educated junior lecturers to the department, which they did not have to pay for, and on the other, we were explicitly treated as industrial doctoral students." Thus, there was a tension between the two different organizations—the university's municipal clients and the senior researchers at the university — "which puts a bit of a damper on the mood." It is worth noting that this informant appreciated her supervisors and never had any conflicts with them despite not getting to choose them.

Furthermore, the informant reported dissatisfaction among students with the fact that the university did not financially support licentiates to continue to the doctoral level. The informant had completed her licentiate degree at one department and "did not want to change departments" to complete a doctoral thesis.

The support that the informant had needed in order not to interrupt her doctoral studies was more support and motivation in applying for a doctoral position.

5.5 Informant 5

The fifth informant's non-completion motives are represented by four different themes: (i) problematic supervisor-supervisee relationship, (ii) unclear requirements, (iii) cultural outsider perspective, and (iv) lack of work-life balance.

Concerning the supervisor-supervisee relationship, the informant believes she was the main supervisor's first doctoral student, so the supervisor was inexperienced. The co-supervisor moved, so the informant was appointed a new co-supervisor. The new co-supervisor was also

appointed department head during the process, thereby having two different relationships with the informant. Having a co-supervisor with several loyalties caused confusion for the informant: "the co-supervisor was wearing double hats. What kind of relationship did we have really?" The informant felt that "the relationship was cracked."

For this informant, dealing with unclear requirements meant that "There were no milestones and no clear achievements. It was unclear what I had to achieve to make the next step on the salary scale," so she lost motivation. After a" brutal" seminar experience, the informant said she felt "beaten in a boxing ring, a 50% that was not approved." This experience made her unsure how to move forward: "I was scared … I did not know how to react. Will I get fired?" Clearly, the informant and the supervisors had different perspectives on what was required to reach a 50% level of finishing the doctoral studies, and the supervisors were also afraid and stressed that time was running out. The informant reacted with fear and shut herself out by being absent from work.

Identifying as a cultural outsider, the informant had a more severe reaction to criticism: "It was very much a cultural thing. I was completely paralyzed. I felt ashamed. I had lost face; it is a cultural thing." The informant felt that she had not produced what was expected from her, and "I blamed myself, yes, very much. I could not blame the supervisors. I had not only embarrassed myself but also my supervisors. I was self-blaming: why do I do this to my supervisors? They have always supported me." Thus, being a cultural outsider exacerbated the tendency to self-blame, especially since it is difficult to break the cultural barriers.

Concerning the lack of work-life balance, the informant described how "Courses, teaching, and writing were three competing interests with my personal family situation." The informant explained that she had struggles in Sweden, and at the same time, she had to support her family abroad. This lack of balance caused stress and demotivation: "In my home country, if you do not show up, you are fired. I lost my drive, felt defeated, running the marathon." The informant's personal problems and imbalance in combination with unclear guidelines pushed her to drop out: "it got to be too much, and I just burned out."

The themes in this informant's narrative indicate that doctoral students with foreign backgrounds need extra support to understand the requirements, seminar feedback, and expectations and to find a reasonable life-work balance. In retrospect, the informant believed "the supervisors should have had more understanding for cultural differences." The informant also regretted not being more open with her supervisors about her feelings after the 50% seminar.

5.6 Informant 6

The analysis of the sixth informant's narrative resulted in two themes: incompatible interests and adversarial private circumstances. The incompatible interests theme relates to an incompatibility between the doctoral student's personal interests (i.e., needs) and those of the university and the municipality. In the informant's case, the incompatibility made her feel inadequate and, in combination with private circumstances, resulted in the non-completion of her doctoral thesis.

According to the informant, there was a mismatch between her needs and what the

university provided. The informant expressed a need for a university context, namely a good research environment, because “it was hard to sit alone with my thoughts.” She lacked the socialization aspect: “It was a lot of independent work.” However, when she socialized with doctoral students from different subjects, she was told by a professor, “you shouldn’t sit here,” which made her feel unwelcome. The isolation and lack of socialization with peers was made worse during the pandemic: “The pandemic led to a lot of work from home. There were no forums for meetings. Now there is Teams, but it wasn’t like that during the pandemic then you were quite isolated.” Moreover, the informant felt that there was a mismatch between her dissertation interest and the supervisors’ competence.

When it comes to incompatibility with the municipality, the informant revealed that she had to follow the municipality’s interest rather than her own when it comes to her research project. That is, she felt that she had no free choice of the thesis subject. According to the informant, there was a general lack of clarity when it came to who was responsible for the thesis project, the municipality or the doctoral student. The incompatibility became more problematic when the municipality’s interest in the project decreased. “The topic was getting stale,” so the informant doubted whether the thesis results would be useful to the municipality. Furthermore, a key person within the municipality retired, which contributed to the municipality showing less interest in the thesis work: “the interest was personal.” Since the choice of topic was not her own (i.e., the municipality’s interest was not compatible with her own), the informant lost the motivation to carry on her research when the municipality decreased its interest.

Adversarial private circumstances also contributed to this informant's non-completion. She was on parental leave twice because she could not carry on her doctoral studies with a newborn child: "there was a break in the studies solely for that purpose. You have to be actively engaged to understand your own thoughts. Difficult to divide the weeks and have different focuses, difficult to be in two places." She also did not live in the municipality where the workplace was located; she had to commute from one municipality to another, with about an hour's travel time each way. These circumstances prevented her from devoting her full attention to her doctoral studies and made her feel overwhelmed.

In terms of the support that would have allowed her not to interrupt her studies, the informant said she needed a manager in the municipality who was more knowledgeable and interested in her project. Further, her motivation might have been higher if she had been able to choose a research topic completely freely. From the university, she needed a research context or community to be a part of. (Perhaps, she would have dropped out anyway. It is impossible to know.)

5.7 Summary of the Results

The question guide employed in this study comprised four areas—background factors, supervisor relationship, motivation, and work environment—and all four areas are covered in the informants' answers. In total, this study identified ten different reasons for non-completion: problematic supervisor-supervisee relationship, unclear requirements, cultural outsider perspective, noncommitted main supervisor, lost motivation, adversarial private circumstances,

lack of work-life balance, organizational deficiencies, conflict with senior researchers, and incompatible interests. These ten themes are consistent with Phan's (2024) five themes that illustrate the difficult challenge of combining doctoral studies with a private life (see the literature review section). In their study of factors leading students to leave their doctoral studies, Leijen and Remmik (2016) grouped the identified factors into students' personal factors and factors related to the institution and the wider learning environment (see also Borders, et al, 2020). Similarly, the ten reasons identified in this study can be grouped into reasons connected to the university (problematic supervisor-supervisee relationship, unclear requirements, noncommitted main supervisor, organizational deficiencies, and conflict with senior researchers) and those connected to the doctoral student (lost motivation, adversarial private circumstances, lack of work-life balance, and cultural outsider perspective). One reason is situated at the intersection of these two groups (incompatible interests).

6. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the similarities and patterns visible in the identified reasons for non-completion. It is organized based on the measures that can be implemented to reduce the risk of non-completion: providing holistic support and encouragement, mitigating students' self-blame, and clarifying requirements.

6.1 Providing Holistic Support and Encouragement

The study results indicate that non-completion is multifactorial. The interviewed doctoral students all provided multiple reasons for not completing their studies. This is well in line with previous research, which shows that early career academics find it difficult "to orient themselves in situations characterized by multiple social orders and a diverse set of competing rationales" (Nästesjö, 2024, p. 21). Therefore, academic institutions and supervisors are obligated to address the whole breadth of factors that cause doctoral students to non-complete.

Regarding the role of supervisors, what doctoral students primarily need is more supportive and motivating conversations. In the interviews, the doctoral students mainly asked for positive feedback and encouragement, which is in line with previous research (Kilminster & Jolly, 2000). One of the informants speculated whether supervisors withhold encouragement because they "must keep an authoritative distance and not be soft". The same informant requested feedback indicating where she is in the process (i.e., how much supervision time she has used and how much time she have left, what quality criteria does she meet, etc.). That is, in addition to encouragement, doctoral students need supervisors to clarify the process, stay updated on the students' progress, and show an interest in the students' research. Notably, only one of the informants was given the chance to influence the choice of supervisor. The inability to influence the choice of one's supervisors evidently affects the non-completion of one's thesis because it reduces the possibility of building a well-functioning relationship with the supervisor.

Being part of a relevant research environment, on site, is also something that the

informants requested. The fact that supervisors and doctoral students were not physically present in a joint research environment was another reason highlighted for non-completion. The informants wanted to sit and act in a mutual research environment with other doctoral students and senior researchers (e.g., their supervisors).

6.2 Mitigating Students' Self-blame

Importantly, personal circumstances were often mentioned as reasons for non-completion, thereby shifting the blame from the institution and supervision to the self. For example, several of the informants stated that they have a complicated life situation, with expectations from several different directions (e.g., work, family, and health issues). A similarity between all six informants is that none of them blame the non-completion solely on the supervisors. The results of this study indicate that doctoral students often blame themselves, especially those with cultural backgrounds that differ from the dominant culture of the institution. This is confirmed by Nästesjö (2024): "failure was considered one's own responsibility" (p. 36). Supervisors have an important role in helping doctoral students identify the real causes of their struggle or inability to complete the program. In this process, doctoral students may need help to not only look within and be self-aware but also look for external reasons for non-completion. Minimizing self-blame also requires supervisors to provide critical feedback, not always saying that "everything is good." Since identifying as a cultural outsider was associated with the tendency to self-blame, two of the informants emphasized the value of the supervisors having the ability to understand cultural differences. This understanding includes being able to explain the general goals and

criteria of the doctoral education and being able to make (seminar) feedback understandable.

6.3 Clarify Requirements

The informants pointed to unclear requirements and expectations as reasons for non-completion. Only one informant got to take part in a well-functioning introduction to the doctoral program. As doctoral students, they felt they were left to the mercy of others, especially if they come from another country. The two informants who identified as cultural outsiders both mentioned unclear requirements as non-completion reasons. Both informants claimed they did not receive sufficient help to understand what they were expected to achieve at various stages in the process.[5] Clear assessment criteria were missing. The doctoral students with a foreign background did not understand the feedback they received at research seminars and did not obtain sufficient supervisor support to understand it. The unclarity concerning goals and critical feedback undoubtedly contributed to the students' non-completion of their degree. Nästesjö (2024) confirms this result: "unclear career structures precipitate a feeling of being 'out of control'" (p. 36). Racheal and Abdullah (2019) also show that the main reason doctoral students dislike research was the feeling of uncertainty and in their abilities to handle research and doctoral programs. Supervisors need to avoid unclear requirements and instead support clear structures so that doctoral students (especially foreigners) gain an understanding of the doctoral education and the career system. Supervisors can provide written feedback with explanations and check that the message gets across.

[5] Experiences from multicultural encounters as a doctoral student are further discussed by Fotovatian and Miller (2014) and by Li and Collins (2014).

According to Areskoug Josefsson et al. (2016), supervisors are not primarily concerned with non-completion rates. Rather, they are concerned with encouraging doctoral students who are unsuited for research to give up their doctoral studies. A few of the informants in this study confirmed this by saying that their supervisors should have raised the issue of their unsustainable situation and interrupted their studies earlier.

In the subsequent section, I delineate several conclusions drawn from this study.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The overall conclusion is that non-completion is multifactorial. Consequently, students require different forms of support to avoid it. This conclusion is in line with previous findings by Benjamin et al. (2017). Non-completion factors can be linked to the university or supervisor and, at the same time, to the doctoral student. However, non-completers primarily tend to blame themselves rather than their supervisors and their environment. Therefore, I argue that supervisors should try to take a more holistic approach when supporting doctoral students and identifying potential obstacles to the completion of their degrees. In addition, they should assist their students in identifying the underlying causes of their struggle instead of resorting to self-blame. Finally, the students should receive clear guidelines and assessment criteria, and their cultural differences should be acknowledged and accounted for.

7.1 Future Research

This study exclusively reports on doctoral students' reasons for non-completion. Therefore, future research should also explore supervisors' perspectives on this issue. Conducting interviews with non-completers and their supervisors from various universities would provide a broader basis for understanding the causes of non-completion. The insights gained from the six interviews can serve as a foundation for designing interview and survey questions for supervisors. Additionally, the findings indicate that cultural outsiders may require specialized guidance in their doctoral studies, suggesting that targeted support could be highly beneficial.

7.2 Limitations and Implications

This article only includes interviews with doctoral students and not supervisors. This is a limitation because the supervisors' perspective on reasons for non-completion is a crucial piece of the puzzle to understand why doctoral students become non-completers. Another limitation is that the number of informants is small. More interviews and surveys are needed to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons for non-completion.

The implication is that the possibility of generalizing the results of this study is limited. However, the findings indicate that supervisors need to offer multifactorial supervision that includes encouragement, reduce doctoral students' tendency to self-blame, and clarify the standards and requirements of writing a doctoral thesis.

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THE DESTRUCTIVE NATURE OF MORALLY DISENGAGED LEADERS: HOW SELF-INTERESTED VALUES PERPETUATE MORALLY MUTE CLIMATES

Ilsé Strauss, School of Business, Murdoch University, Australia[6]

Andrea R. Steele, School of Psychology, Murdoch University, Australia[7]

Vita Akstinaite, ISM University of Management and Economics, Lithuania[8]

ABSTRACT

The destructive nature of unethical leadership can be seen in immoral behaviours used by senior leaders who morally mute employees. Research shows that unethical leadership behaviours may contribute to employee mutism, however, there is a paucity of research investigating the relationship between unethical leadership practices and employee moral voice. The current study aimed to better understand how unethical leadership practices and leader values relate to employee moral voice and ethical climates. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees who each had experience with a leader they deemed to be unethical. Results of this study show that unethical senior leaders used distortive communication, including euphemistic labelling, shaming, and moral justification, to prevent employees from speaking up about moral issues. These findings suggest that a socio-cognitive triadic interplay of factors, namely personal, organ-

[6] Ilse@purposesync.com

[7] Andrea.steele@murdoch.edu.au

[8] Vita.Akstinaite@ism.lt

isational, and environmental, are facilitated by senior leaders to morally disengage from ethical concerns of employees, resulting in socially learned employee moral mutism. This study extends moral disengagement theory into the unethical leadership context.

***Key Words*: Unethical leadership, employee mutism, morally mute climates, self-interested values, moral disengagement**

1. INTRODUCTION

> *So off went the Emperor in procession under his splendid [but invisible] canopy. Nobody would confess that he couldn't see anything for that would prove him either unfit for his position or a fool. "But he hasn't got anything on" said a little child, followed by the whole town. The Emperor shivered, for he suspected they were right. But he thought "this procession has got to go on". So he walked more proudly than ever, as his noblemen held high the train that wasn't there at all.* - The Emperor's New Clothes

Unethical leadership practices within organisations span from immoral conduct that offends the moral sensibilities of employees, to illegal acts that overtly break the law (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Hassan et al., 2023). Recent reports show that unethical leadership practices, such as deceptive management, are trending upward (Ethics and Compliance Initiative, 2021) and unethical conduct in top-management accounts for over 26% of global economic crime (PwC, 2020). However, these figures likely also capture increases in reporting so they should be treated con-

servatively. Leaders who behave unethically may inflict harm upon their organisation at various levels. At the employee level, unethical leadership practices are associated with a variety of negative employee outcomes, such as increased turnover intentions (Cialdini et al., 2021), moral injury (Shay, 2014), crimes of obedience (Carsten et al., 2013), counterproductive work behaviours (Guest, 2017), and diminished employee wellbeing (Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2016). At an organisational level, unethical leadership practices may be associated with weak ethical climates (Victor & Cullen, 1988; Victor & Cullen, 2008) and toxic-cultures (Lipmun-Blumen, 2006). Importantly, studies have found that unethical leadership behaviours are a key influence on employee moral voice, which refers to attempts to speak out against objectionable and unethical issues (Afsar & Shahjehan, 2018). This definition suggests that moral voice is an outcome of one's moral sensibilities, such as moral reasoning and actions. It is clear that unethical leadership practices can have a negative effect upon employee voice behaviour but research into its nuances is scarce.

The current study addresses a gap in the unethical leadership literature about the relationship between unethical leadership and employee moral voice. Existing literature has demonstrated that employee voice is likely to be diminished when a leader believes employee voice behaviour may be harmful to the organisation and may bring the organisation into disrepute (Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco, 2010; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Tepper, 2007). Furthermore, leader behaviours, such as overt deceit (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2016), abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007), and fostering weak ethical climates (Victor & Cullen, 1988; Cullen & Victor 2008) all exacerbate employee silence. At a broader level, cultures of toxicity and divisiveness (Lipman-Blumen, 2005) and rigid ethical infrastructures (Tenbrunsel et al., 2003) have also been found to diminish

employee voice. Conversely, scholars have found that ethical leadership increases employee moral voice (Afsar, 2018; Lee et al., 2017), and encourages employees to speak up to highlight ethical transgressions (Cheng et al., 2019). Therefore, there exists a myriad of connections between unethical leadership practices and employee moral voice, but they are fragmented. This is largely because unethical leadership has not been as widely researched as other dysfunctional leadership styles.

Poor leadership behaviours are not frequently situated in the context of ethical dysfunctions but rather, related to toxic, abusive or narcissistic leadership. Subsequently, more research is needed to better understand the ethical context and nature of unethical leadership practices that hinder employee moral voice. The current study aimed to expand upon previous research on the facilitators of employee voice and silence (e.g., Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco, 2010; Erkutlu & Chafra, 2016) to gain an employee's perspective about unethical leadership practices and values, and its relationship with employee moral voice and ethical climates. The goal was to gain new insights about the complex dynamic between leadership conduct, employee perceptions and organisational ethics to support academia and industry in reducing unethical conduct. Two research questions were posed: 1. how unethical senior leaders are perceived by their employees to influence employee moral voice, and 2. how employees view the relationship between the perceived moral values of senior leaders and the organisational ethical climate.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Individual Moral Values

Moral values refer to a personal compass people use to make decisions based on their fundamental ideals about right and wrong (Drumwright et al., 2015; Schwartz, 2012). Values are explained by Schwartz (2012) as a way to understand the motivational basis of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours at multiple levels. Schwartz's values framework (2012) identifies four value constructs: self-enhancement (e.g., hedonism, power, and achievement), openness to change (stimulation, self-direction), self-transcendence (universalism, benevolence), and conservation (conformity, tradition, security). Schwartz (2012) argues that each construct is ideologically polarised, such that a senior leader who values self-enhancement (e.g., power) is paradigmatically opposed to self-transcendence (e.g., benevolence) and conservation (e.g., conformity). Moral values become institutionalised through normative behaviour, rewards, and punishments, and are rarely questioned (Victor & Cullen, 1988). Employees' beliefs about acceptable moral values and behaviours directly influences moral values-based behaviours.

Social cognitive theorists, such as Bandura et al. (1996), posit that our "moral self is embedded in a broader, socio-cognitive self" (p. 193), which means our moral values are shaped by the dominant behaviours displayed within our social environment. Moral values have a strong influence upon an employee's belief about the negative consequences of failing to conform to pro-organisational values (Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco, 2010), especially when the workplace environment does not encourage employees to speak up about ethical issues. Where organisational values are highly controlled through cultural indoctrination, such as shared stories, tradi-

tions and symbols, a person who holds conflicting moral values may be targeted when questioning organisational values (Knoll & Van Dick, 2013; Lee et al., 2017). Poor ethical infrastructures, such as a lack of ethical policies and procedures (Tenbrunsel et al., 2003) and weak ethical climates may subvert the willingness of some employees to engage in positive workplace behaviours, such as moral voice. Additionally, a lack of ethical communication channels further institutionalises immorality and sets a negative tone for company ethos. It is therefore important to be aware of the ethical nature of an organisation's social environment to better understand leaders' ethical practices.

2.2 Unethical Leadership

Unethical leadership is defined as the employees' perceptions of leaders' decisions, actions, and influence as being unethical (Mitchell et al., 2022, p. 567). Unethical leadership practices are varied and can include overt deceit (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2016), retribution (Knoll & Dick, 2013), and abuse (Tepper, 2007) toward employees who attempt to speak up. Employees have expectations that their leaders exhibit certain standards of ethical behaviour and these standards are developed in reference to a variety of sources. First, senior leaders are responsible for fostering an environment that upholds ethical standards (Drumwright et al., 2015), which are based upon individual moral values and that guide ethical judgment and decision-making (Drumwright et al., 2015). Second, senior leaders have a legal responsibility to comply with, and refrain from violating federal workplace laws, such as the Fair Work Act 2009 and Work Health and Safety Act 2011. Third, senior leaders are expected to follow codes of conduct, as outlined by company and

industry guidelines (Greenwood, 2008). Finally, senior leaders have a role-based responsibility to ensure that they manage the organisation's proper functioning and create positive outcomes for stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2012). Subsequently, employees likely base their perceptions of unethical leadership upon their personal moral values, laws, and guidelines.

2.3 Moral Disengagement

The complexity of an organisations' social-learning environment justifies a socio-cognitive perspective from which to explore unethical leadership practices. Moral disengagement theory provides a novel perspective of unethical leadership by exploring socio-cognitive mechanisms of unethical conduct (Bandura 1986; Bandura et al., 1996). Moral disengagement proposes that when confronted with an ethical violation, people can self-regulate their cognitive faculties and disconnect with personal morality to absolve themselves from moral guilt (Bandura et al., 1996). Previous research suggests that employees who perceive their leaders as morally disengaged are more likely to be morally disengaged themselves (Lian et al., 2022), or engage in non-organisationally compliant behaviour (Hystad et al., 2014). By applying moral disengagement as a theoretical lens, it may provide a way to better understand the socio-cognitive landscape in which unethical leadership practices occur.

3. METHODS

An interpretive theoretical perspective was adopted to prioritise the meanings individuals' attribute to morality in their roles (Saunders et al., 2019). Interpretivist paradigms hold an episte-

mology that knowledge is created through constructed meanings in complex environments. This inductive qualitative research study involved conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews to investigate employee perceptions of unethical senior leaders they have experienced during their careers. Participants were recruited through social media (LinkedIn) and word of mouth. The selection criteria included Australian employees who in the last 10 years had worked under senior leaders who they consider unethical. The final sample included a mix of past/current employees from various industries (including police, education, and telecommunications) and sectors (private, public, and not for profit [NFP]). Twelve interviews were conducted online with 4 male and 8 female participants (aged 23 - 58 years old). Participants were asked a series of six open-ended questions about their perceptions of how their previous or current unethical senior leaders influenced employee moral voice (either their voice or the voice of other staff) and organisational ethical climates. Example questions included “how would you describe the ethical views held by this senior leader” and “could you describe the senior leader's perspective on employee’s having a voice on unethical issues”. Interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes.

Interviews continued to be conducted to the point of data saturation, which was reached once no new themes emerged (per Charmaz, 2006). With participant consent, audio recordings were made of all interviews through Microsoft Teams software and transcribed using online transcription software (Trint.com). Interview transcripts were manually checked for accuracy. Participants were invited to review their transcription to suggest adjustment prior to analyses. An inductive thematic approach was applied to derive themes at the semantic level, ensuring patterns and themes are directly observable in the data and were grounded in participant responses (Braun

& Clarke, 2006). Analysis of the data was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. Four themes were developed to capture all of the developed codes which are explained in the following section.

4. RESULTS

Thematic analysis identified four key themes: moral mutism, ethical distortions, morally mute climates, and self-interested values. Table 1 outlines unethical issues identified by participants that were perpetrated by their leader, including abusive supervision and breaching employment legislation. Participants were quiescently mute about their ethical concerns because they perceived that speaking up about unethical and illegal issues may have resulted in retribution from their senior leader.

TABLE 1

Ethical issues associated with employee moral mutism

Unethical Issue	Description	Exemplar Quote
Weak ethical climate	Poor ethical decision making (e.g., deficient moral reasoning and action by senior leaders)	"Unless it was serving him, he didn't want to know, people wanted to talk to him about ethical stuff" (P2)
Abusive supervision	Bullying and harassment (e.g., degradation and sexual harassment)	"He would call them derogatory terms like 'sl*t' and 'wh***rs'" (P9)

Organisational injustices	Procedural and distributive injustices (e.g., inadequate process and deficient accountabilities)	"There are rules in place for a reason…but it's a rule for the workers and rules for the managers" (P7)
Toxic leadership	Dividing and conquering employees (e.g., gossip and lies)	"She would just flip like Jekyll and Hyde…she would say "you are a liar"… then twist your words" (P12)
Poor employee wellbeing	Dehumanisation and diminished psychological health (e.g., diminished sense of self and self-harm)	"There was no room for being human" (P12)
Remuneration violations	Non-payment of wages and superannuation	"When superannuation wasn't getting paid, they would say 'why were you talking about it [and] letting these conversations happen'"? (P3)
Discrimination	Gender discrimination (e.g., racism and breaching maternity leave regulations)	"The Aboriginal worker…she had a breakdown and sued the company for bullying, harassment and racism" (P5)
Safety breaches	Work health and safety issues (e.g., failing to provide protective gear)	"We've all worked overtime… we're not watering, we're not feeding…but senior sergeants threaten that if you start pushing they will ruin your career" (P6)
Preferential treatment	Cronyism and favouritism (e.g., hiring and promoting friends and conformist employees)	"People [employees] below us are all controllable because those that start to question too much or who are expecting a level of transparency that we're not providing, they end up leaving, or we push them out in some way in preference for people who are just more compliant" (P10)

5. ETHICAL DISTORTIONS

Participants perceived that their unethical senior leaders used communication styles that distorted the ethical issue and moral nature of the conversation to keep employees from speaking up about moral issues. It was expressed by participants that senior leaders used organisational jargon to validate unethical acts as acceptable behaviour and to distort employees' views about unethical issues, such as employee mistreatment. Moral justifications for unethical behaviour were evident when leaders espoused company values and rationalised unethical behaviour as having a noble purpose. These distortions minimised employees' ethical concerns and conveyed that their concerns were unimportant. Participant 8 outlined an example of rationalising unethical behaviour:

> *She has an assistant that she has always been extremely rude to, [I said] "I think you need to be a bit more respectful because she's doing a good job. She's got young kids, and she's always working late". And so, her response was, "oh, she needs it - she knows very well that I'm training her" (P8, F, 56y/o, Public RTO).*

The response of P8's leader suggested to her that rudeness was a requirement for training employees. Other participants expressed their experiences and outlined how they were instructed to regard demoralising admonishments from their senior leaders as an appropriate form of feedback.

The data also showed that some senior leaders were seen as using shaming verbal attacks, patronising instructions, and insults, in response to their employees expressing ethical concerns.

Additionally, in these interactions, senior leaders would sometimes make lewd accusations and bring the employee's moral character into question. For example, Participant 5 expressed that their senior leader invalidated an employee's ethical concern by using lewd and offensive language to accuse the employee of ulterior motives:

> *So, then the state manager went to the CEO and said to the CEO that there's this relationship that's happening. And the CEO said to the state manager, and this is in her words, "you're just jealous. you're not f*****g her" (P5, F, 41 y/o, Public, Social Services).*

Multiple participants also perceived their senior leaders using justifications to silence them and other employees from speaking up about ethical issues, such as employing espoused shared values as a way of disregarding unethical behaviours. Participants felt that organisational values were used by senior leaders to generate a feeling of comradery and trick employees into disclosing information that could then be used against them or to encourage poor ethical behaviours from subordinates. A situation shared by P3 highlighted how a senior leader scolded them for failing stop other employees from speaking out about remuneration concerns:

> *Like when superannuation wasn't getting paid, [the senior leader would say] "why were you talking about it as well? Why were you letting these conversations happen?". So, all of a sudden, I [thought] here comes that stick with the value, take responsibility. So why didn't I take responsibility to stop them from talking about an unethical business practice that was happening" (P3, F, 47 y/o, Private, RTO).*

In this excerpt, P3 perceived that her senior leader viewed a lack of conformity and silence by other employees as a violation of informal company values and she was admonished for not upholding these values.

6. MORALLY MUTE CLIMATE

Participants expressed that their unethical senior leaders were seen as orchestrating a morally mute climate that was oppressive and hostile toward employee moral voice. Morally mute climates were described as secretive, toxic, and fear-based and made it difficult for employees to express ethical concerns that went against senior leaders' interests. Key personnel and acts of unprofessionalism facilitated the morally mute climate.

Participants stated that they believed key personnel were corrupted by the unethical senior leader and became a critical feature of the morally mute climate because of their relationships with the senior leader. Participants shared their concerns about the lack of support and bullying from other personnel, such as human resource managers, who were also seen as targeting morally vocal employees and who protected the senior leader from accountability. For example, Participant 2 outlined that human resource personnel would assist the senior leader in fostering an organisational culture whereby employees felt that they had no avenues to speak up about ethical issues:

His H.R person who would help him not cross the line and know exactly where and how to push people. It [the manipulation] was very well done...you never go to the H.R person…anyone who's dumb enough to think I've got a grievance, I'm going to H.R, you just put a massive target on your back here" (P2, F, 39y/o, Private, Cleaning).

Across the data, participants outlined various, inappropriate personal relationships between senior leaders and key personnel, including close friends (P8, F, 56y/o, Public, RTO), a suspected affair (P5, F, 41y/o, Public, Social Work), and marriage (P3, F, 47 y/o, Private, RTO). In these examples, the relationship between personnel and senior leaders was identified as a conflict of interest and a critical feature of facilitating a morally mute climate. Further, other participants, including Participant 2, also outlined how unethical senior leaders were able to get other leaders within their company to be on board with their beliefs, further facilitating a poor organisational culture:

If they wanted to get rid of someone, he [senior leader] would deliberately make all the other leaders in the organisation find something wrong with that person, then bully them out without having to do his dirty work himself" (P2, F, 39y/o, Private, Cleaning).

Participants also expressed that their unethical senior leaders were unprofessional in their management standards. Unprofessional senior leader standards indicated to participants that their leaders were not conforming to company guidelines that dealt with ethical standards (P7, M, 44 y/o, Public, RTO) and policies and procedures (P12, F, 58 y/o, NFP). Senior leader unprofessionalism was outlined by P 12: "well, the policies were there…but…nobody [complied or enforced

it] it was a joke. It was an absolute total joke" (P12, F, 58 y/o, NFP). Other specific issues of unprofessionalism identified by participants included confidentiality and privacy breaches and absence of relevant policy documentation.

7. SELF-INTERESTED LEADER VALUES

Participants were initially sceptical of the idea that their unethical senior leader exhibited any values at all. When probed further, participants perceived their unethical senior leaders as exhibiting self-interested values, such as a fixation towards money, social status, and power. Self-interested values were perceived as the antithesis to the moral values of fairness and care. Multiple participants outlined how their senior leaders were primarily interested and motivated by personal attainment, for example, P1 and P12 spoke about their leaders being self-focussed: “her own ego definitely drove her” (P12, F, 58 y/o, Private, NFP); “it was all about themselves and their KPI’s”, (P2, F, 39 y/o, Private, Cleaning). Self-interested values created a barrier to leaders’ willingness to listening to employees’ ethical concerns:

> *Unless it was serving him, he didn’t want to know, people wanted to talk to him about ethical stuff (P2, F, 39y/o, Private, Cleaning Industry).*

8. EFFECTS ON EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

In contrast to self-interested values, some participants expressed how a more people-centred ap-

proach would be beneficial to the organisation and to the wellbeing and productivity of employees:

> *I think the piece that they're missing is…their ability to recognise good morals in their decision-making…they would get better business outcomes by treating people well. They would have happy employees, happy employees, have less stress, work harder and more creative, which all leads to better business outcomes (P10, F, 48y/o, Private, Health).*

Participants described being afflicted by various physical and mental health issues (e.g., feelings of uselessness), which they attributed to the morally mute climate of their previous organisation. Furthermore, the unethical senior leaders were perceived as having a lack of care about the physical and psychological harm they afflicted upon their employees.

Physical health issues reported by participants included high blood pressure (P12, F 58 y/o, Private, NFP) and weight-gain (P1, M, 53y/o, Private, Telecommunications) that resulted from high levels of work-related stress and exhaustion due to unreasonable workloads (P6, F, 56 y/o, Public, Police Force). Participant 1 expressed how his physical health was affected by the morally mute climate include: "[concerning his "bad habits] …just the overreliance on alcohol to yeah, to forget about the things you can't change…my weight ballooned out" (P1, M, 53 y/o, Private, Telecommunications).

Other participants reported that the morally mute climate adversely affected their psychological health. Psychological health issues reported by participants in response to their unethical senior leader, included mental health (P3, F, 47 y/o, Private, RTO), self-harm (P5, F, 41y/o, Pub-

lic, Social Work), fear (P4, F, 45y/o, Private, Education), and feelings of uselessness (P12, F, 58 y/o, Private, NFP).

9. DISCUSSION

9.1 Employee Moral Mutism

A key finding of the current study is that employees may be morally mute due to fear of speaking up in an environment that is hostile to moral voice. The finding that moral conversations are difficult for employees to engage in with their senior leaders aligns with previous research by Bisel et al. (2011) who found that because of the risky nature of ethical communication, individuals may avoid raising ethical issues and avoid labelling problems as related to organisational ethics. The findings of the current study also align with previous research findings that employees' fear-based silence is a learned response to negative leader behaviour (see Knoll & Van Dick, 2013, Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Therefore, employees are more likely to be morally mute by virtue of the complex and contentious nature of speaking up about ethical problems.

9.2 Ethical Distortions

Participants perceived that their unethical senior leaders employed mechanisms to facilitate moral disengagement (i.e., ethical distortions), which added a barrier to employees speaking up about ethical issues. These ethical distortions were found to closely align with mechanisms of euphemistic labelling, shaming, and moral justification identified by Bandura et al. (1996) as

well as research by Siltaoja et al. (2018) who assert that organisational jargon is used for manipulative purposes. Mechanisms of moral disengagement include 1) reprehensible conduct (e.g., euphemistic labelling of immorality), 2) detrimental effects (e.g., by using advantageous comparisons), and 3) victimisation (e.g., by dehumanising the wounded; Bandura et al., 1996). Because leaders may experience cognitive dissonance if they do not act in accordance with their moral principles, the moral disengagement process may facilitate them to distort feelings of dissonance (Bandura et al., 1996). In the current study, organisational jargon was perceived to be used by senior leaders as a form of euphemistic labelling (e.g., using the term 'training' not 'bullying') to deliberately encourage employees to accept a more palatable term for what they know to be an immoral act. As a result, senior leaders used ethical distortions to convince employees that an immoral act is moral and to absolve themselves from feeling guilt for their immoral conduct because they did not perceive they had violated their moral code.

The current study identified that moral justifications were used by senior leaders to depict their unethical behaviours as serving a worthy purpose for the organisation. Rather than engaging with their employees' ethical concerns, unethical senior leaders diverted attention to the more important need to achieve organisational vision, values, and targets. Similarities exist between these findings and what is already established in dysfunctional leadership literature, such as the use of emotional manipulative language (Christie & Geis, 1970; Dahling et al., 2009), linguistic markers of hubris (Akstinaite et al., 2020), and gaslighting (Johnson et al., 2021).

9.3 Morally Mute Infrastructures

Morally mute climates were perceived to occur across organisational levels and created a hostile environment where it was perceived to be almost impossible to resolve ethical issues. Participants expressed that at the organisational level, employee mutism was facilitated by lack of (or poor) ethical codes of conduct, and policies and key personnel who were complicit with poor ethical standards and who supported the unethical conduct of senior leaders. A poor ethical climate was perceived to be exacerbated by complex situations, such as inappropriate relationships between key senior personnel or a lack of support from human resources. These findings align with Bandura's (2016, p. 15) assertion that moral disengagement occurs both at the individual and at the collective level: "in collective agency in the service of detrimental pursuits, moral disengagement operates throughout a social system to exonerate the system as a whole". This process occurs through a triadic interplay between individual behaviours (e.g., immoral conduct), personal factors (e.g., values, beliefs), and environmental influences (e.g., social sanctions) (Bandura et al., 1996). Subsequently, this self-regulatory process can have adverse effects on ethical decision-making and behaviours because the individual becomes blind to the immoral implications of the conduct. In addition, previous research highlights that organisational infrastructures may contribute to employee moral mutism, especially a lack of ethical frameworks (Jurkiewicz & Giacolone, 2016) that are not entrenched within shared values (Schwartz, 2012) and behaviour guidelines (Dellaportas et al., 2005).

9.4 Effects on Employee Wellbeing

The current findings suggest morally mute climates may adversely affect employee wellbeing. Participants assumed their senior leaders had a moral obligation to uphold strong ethical standards and to foster employee wellbeing. The finding that unethical leadership was perceived to have impacted the physical and psychological wellbeing of employees, is consistent with research showing that when working with dysfunctional leaders, employees may suffer from a higher level of stress (Lipmun-Blumen, 2006), diminished wellbeing (He et al., 2017) and moral betrayal, such as the employee perceiving that a moral agreement was broken (Shay, 2014).

Overall, these findings expand scholarly understanding of moral disengagement theory by suggesting that self-interested values and cognitive restructuring are tools employed by unethical leaders to foster morally mute organisational climates. Furthermore, the current research indicates that morally mute climates may offer another aspect in scholarly understanding of unethical leadership by exploring the organisational environment that facilitates immorality.

9.5 Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations pertaining to this study. First, the results may have been affected by self-selection bias with participants who believed in speaking up about moral issues perhaps more likely to opt into this study. Second, most participants were no longer under the employment of the unethical leader on which they reported, hence based on this sample, it is unclear if we were only hearing extreme, negative opinions about senior leaders compared to the views of those who remained in the employ of leaders. Future studies into the relationship between uneth-

ical leadership practices and employee moral voice may benefit from sampling a larger and more varied selection of participants. Third, this study did not collect data that would assist in understanding the nature of a 'strong' ethical climate and employee moral voice, which would have provided factors to compare against a 'weak' ethical climate. Future studies could consider a comparative scope to understand the weaknesses and strengths of ethical climates to better understand the antecedents and consequences of both.

Although we are limited in the generalisability of the current findings, results suggest that enhancing moral engagement at all three socio-cognitive levels: personal (e.g., moral values and ethical practices), social (e.g., networks), and environmental (e.g., ethical climate) may help to foster ethical climates. It is recommended that practitioners who are responsible for assessing a senior leader's person-organisation fit may benefit from applying ethical assessment tools. The Schwartz Values Framework (Schwartz, 2012) may be a useful tool to assist in determining senior leaders' values, and values conflicts. Further, change-management practitioners may find it useful to use tools such as the Ethical Climate Questionnaire (Victor & Cullen, 1988; Cullen & Victor, 2008) to effectively evaluate employee perceptions about their organisational climates for climate health diagnostics. However, more research is needed to empirically support the development of training curriculums that mitigate against moral disengagement.

10. CONCLUSION

The current findings suggest that employee quiescent moral mutism resulted from an interplay between unethical practices, senior leader self-interested values, and a morally mute climate. Se-

nior leaders used ethical distortions, such as euphemistic labelling, shaming, and moral justifications, and created morally mute climates to oppress employee moral voice. These behaviours are consistent with previous work into the mechanisms of moral disengagement (Bandura et al., 1996). Morally disengaged leaders hold significant institutionalised and hierarchical power to enforce moral muteness and punish non-conformist employees. By operating in an echo-chamber of morally disengaged peers or protective colleagues who reinforce normative unethical behaviour, these leaders continue to act in ways that are destructive to organisations and their employees. Future research opportunities exist to explore possible intervention strategies for decreasing moral disengagement in senior leaders to reduce barriers to employee moral voice.

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THE INFLUENCE OF FINANCIAL LITERACY ON THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF TAILENDERS IN ICELAND: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Sigurdur Gudjonsson, Business Department, University of Iceland, Iceland[9]

Lilja Ómarsdóttir, Business Department, University of Iceland, Iceland[10]

ABSTRACT

This study endeavors to delve into the intricate realm of financial literacy among immigrants in Iceland, with a keen focus on immigrants from Thailand, aiming to unveil its profound implications on their overall economic prosperity. Through meticulous exploration, it seeks to unravel the perceptions and adaptability of immigrants within the job market, their grasp of pension schemes and personal financial management, and how proficiency in the local language shapes these dynamics. A qualitative research methodology was employed, involving 14 in-depth interviews with actively employed people originally from Thailand but now living in Iceland, aiming to elucidate their experiences and perspectives regarding their financial situation in the country.

The discoveries point towards a notable trend: People originally from Thailand, who possess advanced levels of education and mastery of the Icelandic language demonstrate a more profound understanding of financial intricacies within the Icelandic context. As a result, their economic standing tends to be more advantageous when compared to their counterparts with

[9] Siggig@hi.is

[10] Lio9@hi.is

lower educational achievements. Moreover, linguistic proficiency opens doors to a plethora of financial resources and job prospects for them. It's evident that many of these people are drawn to Iceland with aspirations for an enriched quality of life, and in their journey, they stumble upon additional avenues for employment.

***Key Words*: Financial literacy, immigrants, job market**

1. INTRODUCTION

Studies on immigrant labor markets underscore the multifaceted nature of economic integration and the contributions of immigrant populations to host countries' economies. For instance, Portes and Rumbaut (2006) highlight the dynamic nature of immigrant labor markets, emphasizing immigrants' roles in both low-skilled and high-skilled sectors. Similarly, Borjas (2014) discusses the economic assimilation of immigrants, noting variations in labor market outcomes based on factors such as education, language proficiency, and duration of residence.

Research on financial literacy among immigrant populations has gained prominence in recent years, reflecting growing concerns about economic inclusion and empowerment. Lusardi and Mitchell (2014) investigate the financial literacy levels of immigrants in the United States, highlighting disparities based on demographic factors and socioeconomic status.

The phenomenon of transnational migration and its implications for immigrant settlement patterns have been subjects of scholarly inquiry. Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) examine the social

and economic ties maintained by immigrants across borders, highlighting the role of transnational networks in facilitating migration and integration. Additionally, Massey et al. (1993) discuss the determinants of immigrant settlement decisions, emphasizing the interplay between economic opportunities, social networks, and policy factors.

The interplay between immigrant labor markets, economic integration, and financial literacy is complex. While immigrants contribute significantly to host countries' economies, they often face barriers to employment and financial inclusion.

Building upon this framework, the subsequent narrative delves into the specific context of Thai immigrants in Iceland, offering insights into their economic experiences, settlement patterns, and access to financial resources. By connecting broader themes in immigrant research to the unique challenges faced by Thai immigrants in Iceland, this integrated approach enriches our understanding of the intersections between migration, labor market participation, and financial inclusion.

In 2024, Iceland recorded an employment rate of 83.6% (OECD, 2021). Key sectors such as construction and tourism witnessed substantial growth between 2012 and 2018, resulting in a 22% surge in the labor market. The tourism sector alone saw an increase of approximately 14,000 employed individuals during this period, significantly contributed to by immigrants and foreign labor (The Icelandic Confederation of Labour, 2020).

Iceland's labor market is considered flexible, attributed to adaptable real wages, allowing companies to respond swiftly to labor market dynamics and unforeseen events (The Icelandic Confederation of Labour, n.d.; Central Bank of Iceland, 2012).

Driven by increased demand in production, services, and construction, the immigrant population in Iceland has been steadily rising (Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir, 2010). As of January 2024, there were 74,654 immigrants in Iceland, constituting 18.71% of the population, a significant increase from 8.0% in 2012. Between 2012 and 2022, the number of second-generation immigrants increased from 5,264 to 6,575, making first and second-generation immigrants about 20% of Iceland's population.

Internationally, immigrants often find themselves in temporary, informal, or precarious employment, exposing them to job insecurity, layoffs, and substandard working conditions. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), 66.2% of immigrants are employed in service-related roles, 26.7% in industrial sectors, and 7.1% in agriculture. Gender disparities are pronounced, with 79.9% of women in service-oriented positions compared to 14.2% in industry and 5.9% in agriculture. In contrast, 56.4% of men are employed in service roles, 35.6% in industry, and 7.9% in agriculture.

In recent decades, there has been a notable influx of Thai immigrants to Iceland, driven by labor demands in sectors such as the seafood industry, food production, and services (Skaptadóttir and Wojtynska, 2008). Initially arriving on temporary work permits requiring annual renewal (Ruhs and Martin, 2008), the cessation of work permits for individuals from countries outside Europe in 2005 by the Directorate of Labour resulted in a noticeable surge in Thai immigrants to Iceland, primarily facilitated through marriage. Women from Thailand began migrating to Iceland for matrimonial purposes or to explore potential relationships with Icelanders (Bissat, 2013).

The initial Thai immigrant arrived in Iceland in 1978, having married an Icelandic man and subsequently relocating to the country. In the ensuing years, more Thai individuals migrated to Iceland, primarily through marriage. Eventually, siblings, children, and parents of Thai immigrants who had already settled in Iceland began joining them, whether for employment, education, or to find Icelandic spouses (Bissat, 2013). Consequently, the Thai population in Iceland has seen significant growth. In 2020, 282 individuals from Thailand applied for residence permits, making them one of the largest immigrant groups seeking residence that year (Directorate of Immigration, 2020). As of early 2021, Iceland housed 401 Thai women and 172 Thai men with Thai citizenship (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2021).

Over the past four decades, Thailand has made notable strides in social and economic development, transitioning from a developing nation to a newly industrialized country. Following the Asian financial crisis in 1997, Thailand's economy grew at an annual rate of approximately 5% between 1999 and 2005, creating jobs and reducing poverty. Significant improvements have been made in education access, widespread health insurance coverage, and other social safety nets (The World Bank, 2021).

While the financial literacy of Thai immigrants in Iceland may be limited, improvements have been noted in Thailand itself. A survey by the Bank of Thailand and the Thai National Statistical Office during the fourth quarter of 2020 showed an increase in financial literacy scores from 66.2 points in 2018 to 71 points in 2020. The survey also examined whether Thai individuals had adequate savings for emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Only 39% reported having enough savings to cover three months of expenses without additional income,

29.2% had enough for less than three months, and 32.8% were unsure. Approximately 62% were uncertain about their savings and did not have enough for emergencies. Based on these findings, the Bank of Thailand aims to continue enhancing financial literacy across all domains within the OECD framework (Bangkok Post, 2021). However, there is limited knowledge about the financial literacy of Thai immigrants residing in Iceland.

Despite the significant growth of Thai immigrants in Iceland in recent decades (Statistics Iceland, n.d.), scant research has been conducted on their economic status and access to information in the country. Language poses a significant barrier for Asian residents in Iceland (Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir and Ása Guðný Ásgeirsdóttir, 2014), impacting their social status and financial awareness. Specific language courses tailored for immigrants focusing on Icelandic language instruction and information about Iceland's job market are lacking. While newcomers to Iceland are expected to adapt quickly to their new financial environment and labor market, adequate attention may not always be given to ensuring their rights and needs are met (Helga Baldursdóttir, 2015). Thai immigrants often struggle with the Icelandic language and have limited knowledge of their rights and regulations (Þórhildur Vígdögg Kristínardóttir, 2021). Considering these factors, the researcher aimed to further explore the experiences of Thai immigrants concerning finances and their economic situation in Iceland.

This study investigates the economic status of Thai immigrants in Iceland and their access to financial information. It examines their experiences in the Icelandic job market, total income, and borrowing behavior. Additionally, it explores the accessibility of job opportunities and their understanding of personal allowances. Foreign-born individuals in Iceland, including

Thai immigrants, often do not secure jobs matching their educational qualifications. This aspect will be crucial when assessing the impact of education on their financial situation.

The primary objective of this research is to answer the following research question: What is the level of financial literacy among Thai immigrants in Iceland, and how does it influence their economic well-being?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Methodology

This research employed a qualitative research method to deepen the understanding of the research topic and provide enhanced opportunities for data interpretation (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The purpose of qualitative research is to establish a solid understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences (Patton, 2015). This approach supports the experiences and knowledge of the respondents on the subject matter (Charmaz, 2014). Fourteen qualitative interviews were conducted in which participants expressed their financial literacy, their access to information, and their current economic situation in the Icelandic labor market. The participants were required to be residents in Iceland and to have worked in the country. The qualitative analysis followed established methodologies such as thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), allowing for a nuanced exploration of participants' narratives and insights into their lived experiences.

2.2 Participant Selection

Participants were selected through collaboration with educators at the Westfjords Educational

Center, specializing in Icelandic language instruction for Thai immigrants. A student roster was obtained and divided into two groups based on educational attainment: Group 1 comprised individuals with higher education, while Group 2 consisted of those without higher education. Seven participants were randomly chosen from each group. Invitation messages were sent via Facebook, explaining the research's purpose, and potential participants were asked for their interest in participating. If a respondent did not respond, another participant from the same group (Group 1 or Group 2) was selected. Those who responded exhibited considerable interest in the topic and were enthusiastic about sharing their experiences. In total, thirteen female and one male participants, residing in Iceland for 1-25 years, were included in the study.

2.3 Data Collection

Efforts were undertaken to establish a serene and welcoming environment conducive to participant comfort. Interviews were conducted in the participants' homes to foster a sense of ease, ensuring they felt neither stressed nor apprehensive about expressing themselves. All interviews were conducted in Thai, recorded using an audio recorder, transcribed verbatim into Thai text, and subsequently translated into Icelandic. The researcher, being of Thai origin, conducted both the interviews and translations. Given the importance of accurately interpreting interview data, the presence of a translator was deemed unnecessary.

The interviews encompassed open-ended or semi-structured questions. Prior to commencing recordings, participants were assured that they were not obligated to address any topics that made them uncomfortable. They were encouraged to respond based on their individual experiences and perspectives. While some questions offered predefined response

options, participants also had the freedom to provide additional insights or respond in their own words. As participants' answers were rooted in their personal experiences and viewpoints, generalization of these findings is not feasible.

2.4 Data Analysis

This paper utilizes a qualitative research design, emphasizing close proximity between interviewer and interviewee to facilitate open dialogue without preconceived notions or leading questions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Specifically, a phenomenological approach is employed, allowing for a nuanced understanding of their perspectives (Küpers, 2009; Žydžiūnaitė & Arce, 2021).

Phenomenology enables a sensitive examination of lived experiences and contextual understanding, crucial for comprehending the significance of the subject (van Manen, 2014). In-depth interviews were conducted to capture authentic narratives (deMarris, 2004; Esterberg, 2002), which were then analyzed using phenomenological methodology encompassing description, integration, and interpretation (van Maanen, 2016; Lanigan, 1988).

Description involves meticulous transcription and acknowledgment of the significance of each interviewee's story (Lauterbach, 2018). Integration focuses on thematic analysis to identify core facets and extract meaning from the interviews (Nelson, 1989; Orbe et al., 2001). Finally, interpretation seeks to establish connections between themes to illuminate the essence of the interviewees' experiences (Orbe et al., 2001).

3. RESULTS

3.1 Interview Analysis

During discussions on financial literacy and perceptions of the Icelandic job market among Thai respondents in Iceland, it became apparent that individuals with higher levels of education possessed a better understanding of finances compared to those without. A noticeable disparity in financial literacy within Iceland was observed between the two groups, largely attributed to differences in language proficiency. Participants exhibiting strong financial literacy in Iceland consistently demonstrated superior Icelandic language skills and comprehension. Conversely, individuals with limited financial literacy, particularly women, often relied on their partners to manage household finances. Among educated respondents, only one participant was employed in a field aligned with their education. Others expressed frustration at their inability to secure jobs relevant to their qualifications due to inadequate language proficiency.

This section will elucidate four key themes extracted from the interviews:

1. **"If I knew the language better, I might be able to get a better job."**

2. **"This is a weakness among Thais because we don't know the language, so we have to rely on our spouse."**

3. **"All have the same rights."**

4. **"You get paid as much for one hour in Iceland as you do for eight hours in Thailand."**

Theme: "If I knew the language better, I might be able to get a better job"

The result begins by elucidating the challenges faced by Thai individuals in Iceland who

do not possess proficiency in the Icelandic language, highlighting the impediments they encounter in securing gainful employment opportunities, or in some cases, being excluded from the labor market entirely. This observation underscores the pivotal role of language proficiency as a determinant of labor market access and economic integration among immigrant populations. Subsequently, attention is directed towards the experiences of Thai individuals who have attained proficiency in the Icelandic language, noting the tangible improvements in their job prospects and overall well-being. By contextualizing these narratives within the broader discourse on immigrant labor market outcomes, we gain insight into the transformative potential of language acquisition as a mechanism for socioeconomic advancement and integration. Moreover, the discourse extends to the challenges faced by educated immigrants in Iceland, particularly those with formal education credentials obtained abroad, who often encounter barriers to employment due to the limited recognition or valuation of foreign qualifications within the Icelandic labor market. This discussion sheds light on the complexities of credential evaluation and recognition processes in host countries and underscores the need for targeted policies and initiatives to facilitate the integration of skilled immigrants into the labor force. Lastly, attention is drawn to the empowering effects of language proficiency in facilitating immigrants' understanding of their rights and entitlements in the Icelandic context, thereby enhancing their capacity to navigate legal and administrative frameworks and assert their rights effectively. This discussion underscores the multifaceted nature of language proficiency as a determinant of immigrant labor market outcomes and underscores the importance of linguistic integration initiatives in promoting inclusive economic participation and social cohesion.

The sentiment "If I knew the language better, I might be able to get a better job" surfaced prominently in most interviews. Participants believed that enhanced language proficiency, coupled with greater support in areas such as language and financial education, could significantly improve job prospects and overall financial well-being. Respondent number 6 remarked, "If I knew the language better, I might be able to get a better job," while respondent number 3 stated, "Without a strong command of the language, individuals are often limited to low-paying jobs in industries like fish processing or factory work."

Respondent number 1, currently unemployed and seeking new opportunities, underscored the impact of limited language skills on job prospects:

> *"As I find myself without employment, I await job notifications from the Directorate of Labor, yet my limited proficiency in Icelandic poses significant barriers. My employment options are severely restricted due to language constraints. In Thailand, I am proficient in the language and feel more competent in my job. However, in Iceland, communication with coworkers is challenging due to language barriers. I often struggle to find the right words or express myself effectively. Sometimes, I resort to using Google Translate, but it can be difficult to convey or understand messages accurately. In most cases, we rely on gestures for communication. While I appreciate the job market in Iceland, the language barrier poses a significant obstacle to my integration and success."*

Individuals lacking proficiency encountered challenges in communication with colleagues, hindering effective working relationships. Feelings of uncertainty and anxiety regarding job performance and communication were prevalent. Respondent number 7 shared his

perspective:

"I feel somewhat uneasy at work due to language barriers. When you can't understand the language, it's challenging to engage in meaningful communication with colleagues. I often find myself at a loss for words or unable to express myself effectively. It detracts from the enjoyment of work. It's not a matter of embarrassment; rather, it's the frustration of being unable to effectively communicate with others."

A clear correlation emerged between respondents' success in the Icelandic job market and their proficiency in the Icelandic language. Those with advanced Icelandic language skills had a greater likelihood of excelling in their roles. Respondent number 14 emphasized the pivotal role of language proficiency in navigating the Icelandic job market:

"Fluency in Icelandic opens numerous doors to opportunities. Sometimes, you can even forge your own path by creating your own job or business ventures. Personally, I've organized Thai cooking classes and authored recipe books. It's about seizing the opportunities available to carve out a livelihood."

Respondent number 10 reflected on his experience, emphasizing the significance of language proficiency in fostering effective communication and overall well-being:

"Proficiency in the Icelandic language significantly enhances the work experience as it facilitates seamless communication with colleagues. Understanding the language not only makes working alongside others more enjoyable but also fosters deeper connections. Being able to comprehend conversations enables a better grasp of individuals' personalities and cultural nuances. Consequently, establishing meaningful relationships

with Icelanders becomes more attainable, as we can actively engage in discussions and understand their perspectives."

Respondent number 4 echoed a similar sentiment, highlighting the communication challenges faced with Icelandic colleagues at work: "Communication with Icelanders is difficult due to the language barrier."

Comparing respondents with higher education to their current job placements, only respondent number 14, whose occupation aligned with their educational background, exhibited advanced proficiency in Icelandic. Respondents with higher education and proficient Icelandic skills expressed doubts regarding the suitability of their language proficiency for employment relevant to their educational qualifications. Respondent number 9 elucidated:

"I reached out to the university regarding my bachelor's degree. They inquired about my objectives given my extensive experience in the field, suggesting that I could leverage my expertise for job applications in Iceland. However, they recommended short courses to enhance my skills, indicating that my Icelandic proficiency wasn't adequate for Icelandic-taught courses. Despite this, my experience in a nursing home has sparked my interest. Although my language proficiency isn't perfect, it hasn't hindered my enjoyment or effectiveness in the role."

Respondent number 11 offered a similar perspective, detailing his journey in the Icelandic job market:

"When I first entered the job market, I took up a position at a hotel. Upon my initial arrival in the country, I couldn't leverage my educational background for job applications

due to language constraints. I lacked the ability to communicate effectively and understand conversations, posing significant challenges initially. Consequently, I opted to work in housekeeping."

Reflecting on his current job situation, respondent number 11 further elaborated:

"My responsibilities involve food preparation and menu management. Initially, I pondered, 'What am I doing? Why did I pursue an education?' I envisioned myself in an office setting. However, as time passed, I grew accustomed to my role, finding it increasingly enjoyable. Thus, I remain committed to delivering quality food and crafting innovative menus."

Respondent number 12 made an attempt to pursue employment in a field aligned with his education but encountered difficulties primarily due to the language barrier:

"The intricacies of language and vocabulary posed significant challenges. Previously, I endeavored to engage in accounting alongside my husband, who operates a company. Initially, I sought to understand the operational dynamics in Iceland. However, I soon realized that mastering the language was imperative. Despite possessing a comprehensive understanding of concepts such as debit and credit, I encountered a roadblock in the form of vocabulary. I found myself contemplating, 'Can I really do this?"

Similarly, respondent number 7 expressed the sentiment that transitioning to a field aligned with their education in Iceland would entail starting anew:

"Embarking on a career path related to my education would necessitate a thorough understanding of Icelandic accounting practices. It feels like embarking on a fresh

journey since I lack familiarity with the system, compounded by language barriers. Moreover, acquainting oneself with the legal framework adds another layer of complexity, requiring a comprehensive relearning process."

It is evident that individuals from Thailand without formal education often find more lucrative job opportunities with higher wages in the Icelandic job market compared to their native job market. This positively impacts their financial status. However, those with educational qualifications do not necessarily enjoy a similar advantage due to the language barrier, limiting their ability to secure employment aligned with their academic background. This predicament is articulated by respondent number 14:

"In Iceland, individuals arriving from Thailand without formal education have broader employment prospects, often engaging in various roles such as manual labor, which offer superior wages compared to their native country. Conversely, educated individuals like myself encounter challenges. It's uncommon for educated Thais to find employment in their respective fields of study due to language constraints. Despite holding university degrees, master's degrees, or bachelor's degrees, language proficiency in Icelandic remains a barrier. In contrast, in Thailand, there may be more avenues for them to leverage their education and secure higher-paying positions within their field."

Respondents with some level of Icelandic proficiency possessed a basic understanding of their rights and the conversations at hand, albeit with a notable degree of uncertainty in their responses. Respondent number 2 articulated this uncertainty: "There are aspects I might grasp, but my Icelandic proficiency is limited, hindering my ability to fully comprehend and read

Icelandic."

"This is a weakness among Thais because we don't know the language, so we have to rely on our spouse."

Another prevalent theme among respondents was the reliance on spouses to manage finances, a pattern observed in most interviews. Due to limited education and proficiency in both financial matters and the Icelandic language, respondents often lacked a comprehensive understanding of their financial situation and rights within the Icelandic labor market. Consequently, they leaned heavily on their spouses to navigate and elucidate their entitlements. This reliance on spouses was succinctly captured by respondent number 3:

"This is a weakness among Thais because we don't know the language, so we have to rely on our spouse. Even back in Thailand, if one lacks education, they are often unaware of their rights and entitlements from the government."

Continuing, respondent number 3 added:

"I let my husband take care of this for me because I trust him. If my husband acted as if he couldn't be trusted, I would definitely try to educate myself and do it all on my own. But because I trust him, if he can and is willing to handle it for me, he does and helps me pay the bills. It's very convenient and not a serious issue. But as for the rights I'm supposed to have, I don't know anything about them."

Respondent number 2 expressed similar sentiments, adding that if her husband intended to deal with financial matters, he would inform her, saying, "Only when my husband is planning to do something does he tell me about it." Respondent 2's experience was similar: "My husband

just tells me that I need to pay taxes on this and that, like for the car." Respondent 2 also added:

> *"My husband lets me know when the company pays our salaries, and then he tells me what it is. He explains to me what each thing means when the salary comes into my account. When we receive a salary slip, I ask him what this and that means and how everything works."*

Several respondents mentioned the obligation to pay taxes owed. Typically, their spouses would inform them of these obligations and take responsibility for settling the tax debts. For instance, respondent number 10 indicated, "I'm only occasionally aware that we need to settle tax debts. However, my husband usually handles this for us." Similarly, when considering respondents with limited financial knowledge, they often turned to their spouses for assistance, as expressed by respondent number 1: "Whenever there's a financial matter, I usually consult my husband for guidance on what steps to take or how to calculate something." This sentiment was echoed by respondent number 8, who stated:

> *"Truthfully, I don't have much understanding of how calculations are done or what percentage is deducted from my wages. But whenever I have inquiries about this, I turn to my husband for answers. He provides information, including details about taxes and my earnings. For example, he explains how much is deducted from my wages and the amount of tax levied for overtime."*

Regarding saving money in Iceland, it became apparent that financial responsibilities were divided between respondents and their spouses. Typically, husbands managed expenses and insurance related to real estate and vehicles, while wives handled essential purchases for the

household and children, such as groceries and clothing. This was articulated by respondent number 9:

> *"I've managed to save money here, but it's mainly because my husband supports and assists me in meeting our financial obligations. For instance, I don't have to worry about rent, and if there are any insurance premiums or car-related expenses, he takes care of them. On the other hand, I'm responsible for purchasing necessities for our daughter, like diapers and clothing."*

Respondent number 10 expressed a similar viewpoint but noted difficulty in saving money in Iceland due to her lower income. Nevertheless, her husband, with higher earnings, assumed responsibility for all financial affairs at home, while she concentrated on caring for their children:

> *"However, my husband has savings set aside for the family. He manages the household finances, and I utilize my earnings to purchase groceries, clothing for the children, and engage in recreational activities with them. But when it comes to household expenses, my husband takes charge, including managing closed savings accounts. He oversees those."*

Despite respondents' confidence in their financial knowledge, they preferred to share household expenses with their spouses. Moreover, most respondents who remitted money to their families in Thailand monthly did so from their personal earnings, as described by respondent number 11:

> *"I consider myself financially savvy. I handle my finances independently. When I first arrived in Iceland, my husband wasn't involved in my financial matters. I managed*

everything on my own. For instance, I support my family in Thailand by sending them money every month for their living expenses. When I partnered with my husband, we agreed that I would handle grocery shopping while he would cover the rent."

"All have the same rights."

The next theme to be discussed is "All have the same rights." Initially, the respondents explore this through the lens of the welfare system, examining how it ensures equal rights and opportunities for all individuals. Following that, they delve into the freedom of the job market, evaluating how it provides equal access to employment opportunities irrespective of background or identity. Finally, they discuss the satisfaction with the high tax system, considering its role in promoting social equality and ensuring that everyone contributes proportionally to society while receiving equal benefits and protections.

The theme "All have the same rights" explores the welfare system, job market freedom, and satisfaction with the high tax system in Iceland, considering its role in promoting social equality and ensuring everyone contributes proportionally while receiving equal benefits and protections.

Positive experiences with the Icelandic government and its robust social welfare system emerged prominently in most interviews, with respondents expressing preference for it over systems in Thailand. Respondent #1 stated, "I find the system here in Iceland to be very good, almost perfect compared to Thailand." This sentiment extended to the favorable impression of maternity leave policies in Iceland, as described by respondent #1: "Maternity leave exists in Thailand, but it's not as extensive as here. The state provides excellent care for individuals here."

Respondents highlighted opportunities for a brighter future and job market equality, exemplified by respondent #1:

> *"Here, we have opportunities for a brighter future. There's even the possibility of homeownership, which is remarkable. Financial matters in Iceland seem vastly superior to those in Thailand. Icelandic residents receive exceptional care. The Icelandic system is robust, whereas in Thailand, we're often left to fend for ourselves, especially in factory jobs. Here, we're well taken care of, and there's no stigma attached to falling ill; it's accepted without judgment. In Thailand, proving genuine illness for medical leave is often met with skepticism, unlike in Iceland, where rights, such as sick allowances, are upheld admirably. The pressure here is notably less than in Thailand."*

Respondent #10 echoed these sentiments, emphasizing the quality of welfare services and equal treatment: "Iceland offers excellent welfare services and ensures everyone is cared for. Regardless of financial status or employment, the state offers support. In Thailand, being unemployed often leads to dire consequences, but here, governmental aid is available until employment is secured. The earnings from Icelandic jobs are generally sufficient to sustain individuals and their families. While savings may not always be possible, housing security and asset ownership provide stability. Life without funds is exceedingly challenging in Thailand, a stark contrast to the supportive environment in Iceland."

Perceptions of equality in the Icelandic job market were similarly positive, as expressed by respondent #10: "I believe there's a fair playing field in the Icelandic job market, with equal treatment for both foreigners and Icelanders. Opportunities for exploitation or tax evasion are

limited, fostering transparency. In Thailand, there's greater freedom for individual endeavors, but Iceland promotes egalitarian principles, ensuring everyone enjoys the same rights."

Respondent #12 echoed similar sentiments, expressing admiration for Icelanders' willingness to engage in any job regardless of their educational background: "I find the job market here more impressive than in Thailand. In Thailand, there's often a stark division between the educated and uneducated. However, even in occupations like fishing, educated individuals are willing to work. For instance, during Covid, when traditional jobs were scarce, some turned to fishing temporarily. This illustrates a lack of rigid categorization such as 'I am highly educated, so I cannot work in fishing!' People here are adaptable and willing to work in various sectors. Moreover, individuals facing health challenges are afforded opportunities to contribute, a practice not as prevalent in Thailand."

Respondent #10 expressed confidence in his employer regarding wage calculations: "I have limited knowledge of financial matters and rarely scrutinize my paychecks because I trust my employer to remunerate me accurately."

Many respondents perceived Icelandic taxes as high but were satisfied with the corresponding healthcare and other services. Respondent #12 stated: "I was particularly struck by the significant taxation in Iceland. Comparing Iceland to Thailand, while tax rates may be lower in Thailand, the funds are not utilized for national development to the same extent. In Iceland, every krona is allocated to government services benefiting the populace. Consequently, I regard Iceland's system as highly commendable, arguably one of the world's best, with minimal wastage —though I cannot assert this with absolute certainty. Nevertheless, I am thoroughly content

living here."

"You get paid as much for one hour in Iceland as you do for eight hours in Thailand."

The theme "You get paid as much for one hour in Iceland as you do for eight hours in Thailand" initiates a discussion on several aspects, beginning with work-life balance. The compensation structure in Iceland potentially affords workers more leisure time and opportunities for personal pursuits compared to the labor-intensive schedules often observed in Thailand. Subsequently, the focus shifts to an analysis of working hours and pay, elucidating the correlation between hourly wages and overall income disparity between the two countries. Finally, the discourse extends to breaks and rights, delving into the legal frameworks and organizational policies governing rest periods, employee benefits, and labor rights in both contexts. Through this comprehensive examination, a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between pay structures, work conditions, and employee rights in Iceland and Thailand emerges.

"The job market is less demanding here. I've found myself learning new work methodologies and techniques, largely influenced by interactions with my colleagues."

The final thematic thread pertained to the perceived higher quality of life and improved work-life balance in the Icelandic job market, a sentiment echoed by numerous respondents. They noted a comparatively lesser degree of pressure in the Icelandic job market compared to Thailand and emphasized the acquisition of new skills, as articulated by respondent number 1: Respondent number 9, who holds a university degree, echoed similar sentiments regarding the work-life balance in the Thai job market:

"Previously, the work environment was quite demanding; there was little respite or opportunity for rest. Upon completing one task, one was immediately expected to commence the next, without adequate consideration for work-life balance."

Additionally, respondents expressed surprise upon discovering that hourly wages are the norm in the Icelandic job market, in contrast to Thailand where daily rates are negotiated. Respondent number 4 elaborated on this observation:

"I was taken aback by the hourly wage system here in Iceland. In Thailand, compensation is typically negotiated on a daily basis. For instance, if one works a 9-hour shift, a fixed amount is agreed upon for the entire day's labor, such as 300 or 350 baht, depending on the nature of the work. Although higher education may yield better pay, these rates represent the baseline income for labor in Thailand."

Respondent number 2 echoed a similar sentiment, highlighting the significantly higher pay received in Iceland compared to Thailand:

"I've never encountered such generous compensation before. Upon commencing work in Iceland, I was pleasantly surprised by the ample overtime pay and remuneration for every hour worked. In Thailand, a day's work only fetches around 300 baht."

This sentiment was corroborated by respondent number 3, who remarked:

"Here, wages are more substantial, and we are compensated for each hour worked. In Iceland, the hourly rate is equivalent to a full day's wage in Thailand. Consequently, I find employment in Iceland more appealing compared to Thailand, where one works all day but receives compensation for only a fraction of that time."

Respondent number 5 concurred, emphasizing the disparity in wage levels between Thailand and Iceland:

"In Thailand, wages are considerably lower than here. Moreover, in Thailand, compensation is based on a daily rate, whereas in Iceland, it's calculated on an hourly basis, resulting in a notable distinction."

Similarly, respondent number 8 recounted his experience of transitioning from Thailand to Iceland, remarking:

"Personally, I've observed a marked improvement in wages upon relocating to Iceland. The remuneration is substantially better here compared to what I received in Thailand. However, I'm aware that these rates represent the minimum wage in my sector. I can only speculate about the compensation received by those with higher education in Iceland, which I imagine is considerably more generous."

Although respondent number 9 acknowledged the improved working hours in the Icelandic job market, they disagreed with the notion that wages were necessarily superior to those in Thailand, particularly for educated individuals working in relevant fields:

"Admittedly, the working hours are more favorable here. However, in terms of wages, the comparison is nuanced, especially for those with higher education. In Thailand, wages may be higher after taxes for an eight-hour workday, particularly in specialized fields. Nonetheless, it's important to note that in Thailand, the concept of eight-hour workdays is somewhat flexible. Employees often find themselves working overtime or responding to work-related matters outside of designated hours. While there's no explicit pressure to

work beyond scheduled hours, the expectation to remain available and responsive persists."

Respondent number 7, who also holds a university degree, concurred and noted the convenience of commuting to work in Iceland:

"When comparing working hours and wages, the earnings in Iceland are notably lower. However, the convenience of commuting to work in Iceland stands out. In Thailand, the commute to work often entails significant travel distances, whereas here, the proximity makes commuting relatively efficient."

The concept of having multiple breaks within a workday was highlighted by respondents as a positive aspect of the Icelandic job market, as articulated by respondent number 2:

"The availability of breaks here is notably different from Thailand. In Iceland, we have designated coffee breaks, and individuals can take restroom breaks at their convenience. In contrast, in Thailand, the work schedule typically requires employees to continue working until the assigned tasks are completed. While there may be brief breaks in factory settings, such as a single break at noon, the frequency and flexibility of breaks are limited compared to Iceland. Here, we have structured breaks at 10 a.m., lunchtime, and another break at 3 p.m. It's a stark contrast."

Similarly, respondent number 12, also a university graduate, shared a comparable perspective and highlighted the enhanced rights in the Icelandic job market, particularly regarding sick leave, in contrast to the practices in Thailand where employees experience comparatively better treatment:

"In Iceland, if one is feeling unwell and still attends work, there's flexibility to perform alternative tasks for the day. There's a receptive approach where employee concerns are addressed, aiming to improve the overall situation. This contrasts with the situation in Thailand, where illness or inability to work often results in immediate cessation. Icelandic employers afford employees greater opportunities and demonstrate a more attentive approach. The job market in Thailand is notably more demanding. Here, weekends are designated off days. While overtime work is optional, employees are not pressured, and supervisors prioritize open communication and employee satisfaction."

4. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the financial literacy and economic well-being of Thai immigrants in Iceland. By examining their experiences, the research sought to answer the central question: What is the level of financial literacy among Thai immigrants in Iceland, and how does it influence their economic well-being? The findings, derived from fourteen in-depth interviews, reveal significant insights into how education, language proficiency, and socio-economic factors intersect to shape the financial literacy and economic outcomes of these immigrants. The level of their financial literacy and economic well being consists of financial literacy and language proficiency, employment and economic well-being as well as rights and economic opportunities.

The initial inquiry of the study focused on the financial literacy of Thai residents in Iceland and its implications for their financial standing. The findings revealed that, overall, the financial literacy among Thai residents in Iceland was modest. Those with higher educational

attainment and stronger proficiency in the Icelandic language demonstrated a more comprehensive grasp of financial concepts and exhibited greater financial security. While they demonstrated an understanding of personal deductions and pension schemes in Iceland, their knowledge of borrowing practices in the country lagged behind their understanding of such practices in Thailand.

While Icelandic language courses are available, their cost poses a barrier to access for some Thai residents. Additionally, not all are aware of the possibility of reimbursement for Icelandic language courses through their respective trade unions. The researcher suggests the implementation of support mechanisms in Iceland to facilitate better access to Icelandic language education among Thai residents. Such initiatives would not only promote language acquisition but also impart knowledge on legal rights, thereby bolstering their financial well-being and overall quality of life.

Language proficiency emerged as a significant concern among Thai residents in Iceland, given the vast linguistic disparity between their native tongues. Interestingly, even among those who relocated to Iceland through marriage to Icelanders, proficiency in Icelandic was not necessarily superior to those who migrated for other purposes. Findings from a study conducted by Jóhanna G. Bissat (2013) indicated that Thai residents entering Iceland for marital reasons did not consistently exhibit enhanced language skills. This phenomenon could be attributed to a tendency to communicate primarily in English with their spouses rather than immersing themselves in Icelandic.

Individuals with university degrees, particularly in disciplines such as business and

accounting, displayed enhanced financial literacy, even within the Icelandic context. Four respondents with higher education expressed confidence in their comprehension of financial matters, especially those pertinent to Iceland. They exhibited familiarity with their rights within the job market and adeptly leveraged their educational background to negotiate more favorable salaries. Additionally, they demonstrated understanding of Icelandic tax regulations, including the progressive tax structure based on varying income levels. Nevertheless, they concurred on the excessive tax burden in Iceland, positing that pursuing their respective fields in Thailand would yield greater financial remuneration.

The study explored the perceptions of Thai residents concerning the Icelandic job market and the employment prospects available to them. Notably, the majority of Thai immigrants relocated to Iceland with the aspiration of accessing better employment opportunities and higher income levels than those available in their home country. They generally perceived the Icelandic job market as more supportive and equitable. Additionally, they expressed contentment with paying taxes, citing satisfaction with the welfare services provided by the Icelandic government, aligning with findings from a similar study conducted in Australia by Potjaporn Joonlaounn (2017).

Despite often occupying low-wage positions, Thai residents in Iceland found a greater array of job opportunities not contingent upon higher education compared to their experiences in Thailand. Many engaged in self-employment, a practice they had undertaken prior to relocating to Iceland. In contrast, research on self-employed individuals in Thailand indicated concerns regarding financial stability and retirement planning due to economic volatility. Consequently,

Thai residents in Iceland felt more assured within the Icelandic job market and expressed high satisfaction with the welfare benefits extended by the government.

Moreover, respondents attested to the superior working conditions in Iceland compared to Thailand, citing reduced pressure, enhanced rights regarding sick leave and holidays, and improved work-life balance. However, only a minority of Thai residents with higher education secured employment aligned with their field of study in Iceland, with the majority opting for unrelated roles due to perceived limitations in their Icelandic language proficiency. They harbored apprehensions about their ability to perform effectively in roles necessitating advanced Icelandic language skills, hence favoring positions with less stringent language requirements.

Overall, Thai residents in Iceland conveyed appreciation for the opportunities afforded to them to enhance their living standards through employment in Iceland. Emphasis was placed on the significance of language proficiency in facilitating effective communication with native Icelanders and fostering cultural understanding. Individuals possessing stronger language skills reported greater job confidence, enhanced rapport with colleagues, and access to higher-paying positions.

The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to enhance financial literacy and language proficiency among Thai immigrants in Iceland. Providing tailored financial education programs and language courses can significantly improve their economic well-being and integration. Such programs should be designed to address the specific challenges faced by this community, including understanding financial systems, managing personal finances, and navigating the job market.

Furthermore, employers and policymakers should consider initiatives to recognize and utilize the skills of educated immigrants more effectively. This could involve creating pathways for credential recognition and offering support for further education and training in Iceland.

This study has provided valuable insights into the financial literacy and economic well-being of Thai immigrants in Iceland. The research highlights the pivotal role of language proficiency and education in shaping financial literacy and access to economic opportunities. Despite the challenges, the economic benefits of working in Iceland remain a strong motivator for Thai immigrants.

Addressing the barriers identified in this study requires a concerted effort from both policymakers and community organizations. Enhancing financial literacy and language skills, coupled with better recognition of immigrant qualifications, can significantly improve the economic outcomes and overall integration of Thai immigrants in Iceland. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics, focusing on the long-term impacts of such interventions on the economic and social integration of immigrant communities.

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APPENDIX

The following questions were posed during the interviews

Do you perceive yourself as having a solid grasp of financial matters in general?

What is your educational background, and does it align with your current occupation?

Could you describe your current employment, and how long have you been in this position?

How do you perceive the job market in Iceland?

What is your total monthly income?

What are your sentiments regarding saving and financial accumulation in Iceland?

How much do you typically save per month, and what approach do you employ for saving?

Do you remit money to Thailand, and what purpose does this serve?

Are you familiar with personal allowances, their amounts, and do you take advantage of them?

Are you actively contributing to a pension fund, and do you comprehend its purpose?

Are you currently repaying a loan, and have you considered which loan offers the most favorable terms for you?

Do you exercise caution before making a purchase?

What has been your experience with taxation in Iceland?

What insights have you gained regarding financial matters in Iceland, and what aspect surprised you the most?

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS ARTICLE: WHAT DO SPORT JOURNALISTS REPORT ON MOST FROM A CORRUPTION TRIAL

Petter Gottschalk, BI Norwegian Business School, Norway[11]

ABSTRACT

This reflective article presents a case study of journalists in the media reporting from the trial against the former president of the International Biathlon Union. The main corruption charges against the former president were concerned with a car made available to him free of charge by a sponsor of biathlon, exclusive hunting trips paid for by a marketing firm, valuable watches given to him by biathlon organizers, and prostitutes offered to him by Russian biathlon officials. In terms of monetary value, the most valuable bribe was the car, and the least valuable bribe was sex work. Yet findings of this case study showed that the sport journalists preferred to write numerous articles about the alleged access to prostitutes. Fifty-nine major news reports reviewed in the presented research form the basis for this conclusion. Potentially long prison sentences, money involved, and famous defendants are some of the characteristics when selecting and reporting from white-collar crime cases. The findings of this case study support this claim.

***Key Words*: Courtroom, criminology news, biased reporting, case study**

[11] Petter.gottschalk@bi.no

1. INTRODUCTION

Research suggests that the news media may be biased in terms of both what criminal cases are reported and the focus of report from the selected criminal cases. Journalists report from court-rooms when the criminal cases have certain characteristics. According to Wilberg and Gottschalk (2014), potentially long prison sentences, money involved, and famous defendants are some of the characteristics when selecting and reporting from white-collar crime cases. White-collar crime refers to financial crime committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of a leading professional position by abuse of trust and access to resources (Gottschalk, 2022).

Goldstraw-White (2012) claimed that journalist reporting is often biased, aimed at producing a good story rather than a factual report, and tends to highlight particular types of offenders, such as those regarded as famous. Earl et al. (2004) concluded on the theme of information selection bias that hard news of an event, if it is reported, tended to be relatively accurate.

This article reviews media reporting from a courtroom where the defendant was quite famous and where the indictment had certain elements that attracted public attention. The biased reporting seemed to match the elements that attracted public attention such as corruption, prostitution, doping in sports, Russia, and substantial money flows in sports. This article thus addresses the following research question: *What kinds of offenses were highlighted when journalists reported from the corruption trial against the former president of the International Biathlon Union?*

This research is important since media bias is frequently a misinformation problem as Rodrigo-Ginés et al. (2024: 1) argued that "media bias and the intolerance of media outlets and citizens to deal with opposing points of view pose a threat to the proper functioning of democratic processes". They referred to media bias as a journalistic format where the intention is to create memorable stories at the expense of objective and consistent reporting. Sometimes media bias is "the intention of influencing the opinion of the receiver in a particular direction" (Rodrigo-Ginés, 2024: 4).

In the current case study, where all the media sent sport journalists to the courtroom that obviously had no understanding of the criminal justice system, the media bias was obvious and harmful to the defendant. The idea of being considered innocent until proven guilty, and the principle of conviction only when evidence is beyond any sensible and reasonable doubt were obviously unknown to the journalists reporting from the courtroom. It was not until four weeks into the six-week trial that some of the news attempted new angles on the court case.

This article starts by presenting the indictment, followed by the research method of studying courtroom reports in the media. Then ten indictment issues in four groups are ranked according to their coverage in the media. Not surprisingly, the matter of alleged sex with prostitutes, provided to the former IBU president by Russian officials, got most of the media attention. The case had been covered in the New York Times three years earlier (Panja, 2021).

2. THE INDICTMENT

The indictment by the Norwegian national authority for investigation and prosecution of economic and environment crime (Økokrim) was based on Norwegian criminal code paragraphs § 276 and § 388 regarding corruption. The former president of International Biathlon Union (IBU) was charged having demanded, received, and accepted inappropriate benefits caused by his position as the president at IBU. The indictment claimed that the corrupt acts represented serious violations of the trust that resides in the position and that the corrupt acts resulted in substantial financial benefits. While the IBU is headquartered in Austria, the president was the Norwegian Anders Besseberg. The indictment by Økokrim said:

"While Besseberg resided in Vestfossen in Norway and in connection with his position as president of the International Biathlon Union (IBU), he demanded, accepted, and received the following benefits in the period 2009-2018:

1. Sometime in 2011, probably in connection with board meeting number 100 of the IBU in March 2011 in Khanty-Mansiysk in Russia, he received an Omega watch (color copper/black) from an official in Russian biathlon. The value of the watch was approximately NOK 195,000 (USD 19,500).

2. Sometime probably in April 2013 and prior to the Winter Olympics in Sochi in Russia in 2014, he accepted an offer of a prostitute who was procured for him from an official in Russian biathlon. This probably happened in connection with a biathlon show race in Moscow.

3. Sometime probably in 2013, and during a biathlon event in Russia, he received a Hublot watch from a Russian official in the Ugra region. The watch was worth approximately NOK 70,000 (USD 7,000).

4. In April 2013, in connection with a trip to Tyumen in Russia, he was paid for by Russian government officials to stay and go on hunting and fishing trip at a hunting resort, where he was taken by helicopter. During the stay, moose, wild boar and deer were hunted.

5. In 2014, at the end of the Biathlon World Cup in Holmenkollen in Norway, he received a Ulysses Nardin watch (color: black with leather strap) from an official in Russian biathlon. The value of the watch was approximately NOK 78,000 (USD 7,800).

6. In October 2015, he was sponsored by a hunting trip to Tyumen by an official in Tyumen, Russia. Besseberg also received a free trophy after killing a maral deer.

7. In the period 2015 to 2018, Besseberg on several occasions accepted offers of prostitutes organized and offered to him by government officials connected to Russian biathlon. The stay with a woman for several days and nights was arranged for him by such persons on at least two occasions, i.e., probably in March 2016 in Khanty-Mansiysk in Russia in connection with an IBU World Cup event, and in March 2018 in Tyumen in Russia in connection with the IBU World Cup finale.

8. In March 2018, on the occasion of a stay in Tyumen in Russia, Besseberg was entrusted by Russian government officials with hunting and fishing trip with accommodation and

hospitality at a hunting resort in Russia. During the trip, Besseberg hunted maral deer and wild boar.

9. In the period 2009-2018, Besseberg had a standing agreement to participate in hunting trips with the owner and general manager of the company APF Marketing Services GmbH (hereinafter "APF"), who was later a consultant for Infront Austria GmbH (hereinafter "Infront") and a member of Infront's advisory board. Hunting stays and hunting trophies were free of charge for Besseberg and were paid for by the mentioned person, his company or by Infront. The hunt took place regularly one to three times per year in Austria and/or the Czech Republic at exclusive hunting sites. Usually, Besseberg also received trophies from the animals he killed. During this period, APF and later Infront had agreements with the IBU for marketing and sponsorship rights for IBU biathlon events or were in negotiations with the IBU on such agreements, which Besseberg approved/signed in his capacity as president of the IBU.

10. In the period 2011-2018 at his place in residence in Norway, Besseberg privately had a car of the type BMW X5 at his disposal, for which Infront covered the leasing costs. The value of this was approximately NOK 850,000 (USD 85,000).

The benefits are considered inappropriate, and the violation is considered serious, especially because of the value, because there was lack of transparency about the benefits he received. By accepting the benefits, Besseberg violated the trust that accompanied his position at the IBU, as

he acted in violation of the IBU's guidelines and because, by virtue of his role in the IBU, he had the opportunity to influence decisions of importance for Russian biathlon and for APF/Infront."

There are ten charges listed above, yet some of them have the same contents. Besseberg received valuable watches (charges 1 and 3 and 5), he accepted offers of prostitutes (charges 2 and 7), his luxurious hunting trips were paid for (charges 4 and 6 and 8 and 9), and he had privately a BMW car at his disposal. The prosecution argued in court that these gifts were improper for Besseberg to accept since acceptance represents an improper advantage that he achieved in the position of president at the International Biathlon Union. Basically, there are the following four charges: valuable watches, sex with prostitutes, luxurious hunting trips, and the car for free.

The improper advantage from each of the four item groups can be ranked in terms of financial value. Then it seems that the car was most valuable (USD 85,000), followed by hunting trips (not estimated by the indictment, might be guessed at USD 50,000 based on an assumption of ten trips at five thousand dollars each), then the watches (USD 34,300), and finally sex with prostitutes (if assuming twenty times at a cost of two hundred dollars each time, then it might be guessed at USD 4,000). Given this assumption of declining value from the car via hunting trips and watches to prostitutes, it is interesting to review what journalists emphasized in their reporting from the courtroom. The impression ahead of the following analysis was that it was in the opposite direction that the media reported: first prostitution, then watches and hunting trips, and finally the car.

3. DATA COLLECTION IN THE COURTROOM

While the organization in question is headquartered in Austria, the former president is a Norwegian, therefore, the trial was carried out in a Norwegian district court.

The Buskerud district court at the town of Hokksund was the site for the trial against Besseberg since it was close to his residence in Vestfossen in Norway. The witness box was in the middle of the courtroom facing the professional judge and four lay judges. At each side of the witness box were prosecution and defense benches respectively. Four people from the national authority Økokrim were sitting at the prosecution bench, while three people were sitting at the defense bench: the defendant and two defense attorneys. Behind the witness box and prosecution and defense benches were the spectator benches where journalists had desks in front of them to make notes and report back to their editorial offices.

The author of this article followed the trail on a daily basis to collect qualitative. Journalists present did the same. Some journalists followed the trial on Webex link over the internet. More than twenty journalists from various news media following the proceedings. The main reporting journalists were Aarre (2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d), Bergh (2024), Brennevann (2024a, 2024b), Busk (2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d, 2024e, 2024f, 2024g, 2024h, 2024i, 2024j), Cederblad (2024a, 2024b), Christiansen (2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d, 2024e, 2024f), Christiansen and Friberg (2024), Christiansen and Thorkildsen (2024a, 2024b), Fossen (2024), Gamlem (2024), Hugsted (2024), Hugsted et al. (2024), Johnsen and Brennevann (2024), Mangelrød (2024), Mangelrød and Bårtvedt (2024a, 2024b), Mangelrød and Ekeland (2024), Mangelrød et al. (2024a, 2024b, 2024c), Remvik (2024); Remvik and With (2024), Røed-Johansen (2024a,

2024b, 2024c, 2024d), Selliaas (2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d), Strøm (2024), Strøm et al. (2024), Welhaven (2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d), and With (2024).

Each of these 59 media reports in the first four weeks of the six-week trial in the Norwegian district court were analyzed in terms of their mentioning of the four categories of indictment issues: car at his private disposal free of charge, luxurious hunting trips paid for by others, valuable watches as gifts, and sex with prostitutes arranged by biathlon organizers.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The 59 media reports are listed in Table 1. Not all of them addressed indictment issues. Some of the articles focused on the doping scandal in Russia that was not part of the indictment. For example, Christiansen (2024d) addressed the issue of ignorance towards doping. Other articles focused on the lack of guardianship and controls generally at the IBU. For example, Røed-Johansen (2024) addressed the issue of executives who stay for too long in their positions. However, most of the media reports mentioned one or more of the four indictment groups. Table 1 lists the mentioned topics ranked by importance in each article. Distinction is made between the first, second, third, and fourth topic in terms of emphasis in each article. Typically, the first topic was part of the article heading or at least part of the article preamble. For example, Aarre (2024d), Christiansen and Friberg (2024), Christiansen and Thorkildsen (2024a), Fossen (2024), Johnsen and Brennevann (2024), and Mangelrød et al. (2024b, 2024c) all had prostitutes in the article headings.

TABLE 1

Sport journalists reporting indictment topics from the courtroom

MEDIA REPORT	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	FOURTH
Aarre 2024a	Watch	Trip	-	-
Aarre 2024b	Trip	-	-	-
Aarre 2024c	Trip	-	-	-
Aarre 2024d	Sex	-	-	-
Bergh 2024	Sex	Watch	Trip	Car
Brennevann 2024a	Watch	-	-	-
Brennevann 2024b	Watch	Trip	Sex	Car
Busk 2024a	Sex	Trip	Watch	Car
Busk 2024b	Sex	-	-	-
Busk 2024c	Sex	Watch	Trip	Car
Busk 2024d	Sex	-	-	-
Busk 2024e	-	-	-	-
Busk 2024f	-	-	-	-
Busk 2024g	-	-	-	-
Busk 2024h	Watch	Trip	-	-
Busk 2024i	Car	-	-	-
Busk 2024j	Sex	-	-	-
Cederblad 2024a	Trip	Watch	Car	-
Cederblad 2024b	Sex	-	-	-
Cederblad 2024c	-	-	-	-
Cederblad and Olsen 2024	Watch	Trip	Sex	Car
Christiansen 2024a	Sex	-	-	-
Christiansen 2024b	Car	-	-	-

Christiansen 2024c	Sex	-	-	-
Christiansen 2024d	-	-	-	-
Christiansen 2024e	Watch	-	-	-
Christiansen 2024f	Trip	-	-	-
Christiansen and Friberg 2024	Sex	-	-	-
Christiansen and Thorkildsen 2024a	Sex	-	-	-
Christiansen and Thorkildsen 2024b	Watch	Trip	-	-
Fossen 2024	Sex	-	-	-
Gamlem 2024	Watch	Trip	Sex	-
Hugsted 2024	Trip	-	-	-
Hugsted et al. 2024	Watch	-	-	-
Johnsen and Brennevann 2024	Sex	Watch	-	-
Mangelrød 2024	-	-	-	-
Mangelrød and Bårtvedt 2024a	Trip	-	-	-
Mangelrød and Bårtvedt 2024b	Trip	-	-	-
Mangelrød and Ekeland 2024	Sex	-	-	-
Mangelrød et al. 2024a	Trip	Watch	Sex	-
Mangelrød et al. 2024b	Sex	-	-	-
Mangelrød et al. 2024c	Sex	-	-	-
Remvik 2024	Sex	Watch	Trip	-
Remvik and With 2024	Sex	-	-	-
Røed-Johansen 2024a	Watch	Trip	-	-
Røed-Johansen 2024b	-	-	-	-
Røed-Johansen 2024c	Trip	-	-	-
Røed-Johansen 2024d	-	-	-	-
Selliaas 2024a	Watch	Sex	Trip	Car

Selliaas 2024b	Watch	Sex	Trip	Car
Selliaas 2024c	Trip			
Selliaas 2024d	-	-	-	-
Strøm 2024	Watch	Sex	-	-
Strøm et al. 2024	Watch	-	-	-
Welhaven 2024a	Sex	-	-	-
Welhaven 2024b	Trip	Watch	-	-
Welhaven 2024c	Trip	Watch	Sex	-
Welhaven 2024d	Watch	Trip	Sex	-
With 2024	Sex	Trip	Watch	-

Table 2 lists frequencies in Table 1. The most frequent topic was sex by prostitutes provided to the defendant by biathlon organizers, followed by exclusive hunting trips paid for by sponsors and biathlon organizers, luxury watches given to him as gifts by national officials, and the car at his disposal at home in Norway free of charge paid for by biathlon sponsors.

TABLE 2

Frequency of indictment topics reported by sport journalist

	Car at his disposal free of charge	Exclusive hunting trips paid for	Luxury watches given to him as gifts	Sex by prostitutes provided to him
First	2	12	15	20
Second	0	10	8	3
Third	1	5	2	6
Fourth	7	0	0	0
Total	10	27	25	29

5. DISCUSSION

While being the least valuable bribe in monetary terms, the alleged sex with prostitutes dominated the reporting in Norwegian media. Sex with a prostitute might be characterized as a transaction where benefits of value are exchanged. Sex with a partner might be characterized as a relation where co-creation of mutual benefits occurs. The transactional experience can thus be very different from the relational experience. The Norwegian criminal police refer to sexual penetration as use of any of the body's openings. In Norway, the person perceived as the stronger part of the sex transaction is criminalized. The sex customer – typically a male – is considered the stronger side of the transaction as compared to the sex supplier – typically a woman – considered the weaker side of the transaction. While the demand side is criminalized, the supply side is therefore not criminalized. In a different market, the supply side rather than the demand side is responsible for a criminal offense. This is the market for narcotic drugs such as heroin and cocaine, where the seller of drugs commits a crime, while the user of drugs is never charged with a crime. Surprisingly many Norwegian men have experience with prostitutes, both domestically and abroad. It is a criminal offense to buy sexual services both at home and abroad. However, as exemplified by a website named real escorts, there is a substantial offering of services from sex workers in Norway where the pricing depends on criteria such as length of time and number of discharges. Laws regarding prostitution differ among countries in the world. Some countries have criminalized both supply and demand, some have criminalized none of them, some have criminalized the supply, while other countries have criminalized the demand as in Norway. In Russia, only the supply side of prostitution is criminalized. The punishment for engagement in

prostitution was fine from 1500 up to 2000 rubles (USD 15 up to 20) according to the Code of Administrative Infractions. Moreover, organizing prostitution is punishable by a prison term. Paying for sex is not punishable in Russia.

6. CONCLUSION

This brief article has addressed the following research question: *What kinds of offenses were highlighted when journalists reported from the corruption trial against the former president of the International Biathlon Union?* Findings indicate that rather than reporting some substance from the trial against the former president of the international biathlon union, Norwegian sports journalists focused on a touchy tabu topic. Paying for sex with prostitutes, and the allegation against the former president regarding his access to prostitutes provided especially by Russian officials made the headlines. As presented earlier in this discussion article, according to Wilberg and Gottschalk (2014), potentially long prison sentences, money involved, and famous defendants are some of the characteristics when selecting and reporting from white-collar crime cases. The findings of this case study support this claim. In conclusion, while it is up to the court to decide whether the defendant was really guilty of corruption, the Norwegian public learned about the case by reporting in the media which was biased due to the focus on the tabu subject of paid sex as bribery. Future research should extend this case study approach to media coverage of bribery issues in such contexts.

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ARCHITECTURAL PROJECTS IN ICELAND: CREATING VALUE AT THE DESIGN PHASE

Catherine Linh Thuyvu Duong, Construction Architect and Project Manager[12]

Gillian Warner-Søderholm, USN School of Business, department of Business Strategy and Political Sciences. USN, Norway[13]

Inga Minelgaite, School of Business, University of Iceland, Iceland; and School of Public Management, Governance and Public Policy, University of Johannesburg, South Africa[14]

ABSTRACT

The Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) sector in Iceland is navigating unique pressures stemming from extraordinary supply-and-demand dynamics. Persistent issues, including budget overruns, a lack of cohesion, and minimal standardization, hinder efficiency and control, negatively impacting outcomes. Achieving success in this field hinges on the ability to deliver value to stakeholders by addressing both monetary and intangible aspects of value creation.

This research focuses on understanding how value is generated during the design phase of architectural projects in Iceland. The results underscore the importance of strong project

[12] Cathy@tark.is

[13] Gillian.warner-soderholm@usn.no

[14] Inm@hi.is

management practices in achieving durable building outcomes and maximizing project efficiency. Additionally, streamlined quality assurance processes and effective communication networks play a vital role in maintaining consistency and professionalism. Projects that are well-structured, with clearly defined objectives and open lines of communication, show improved productivity. Essential elements like organization, regular follow-ups, and diligent oversight are critical for delivering value. Moreover, the performance of a company is shaped by the collaborative efforts of diverse stakeholders, including architects, contractors, clients, managers, project owners, and other decision-makers, with the scale and complexity of the project influencing their roles. We identify also that Iceland's cultural values of low hierarchy, informal communication, tolerance of risk and de-centralized power in an organization impact how projects are managed. The study indicates that a clearer leadership structure and transparent, timely communication with all stakeholders in projects would improve sustainable project management and value creation

***Key Words*: Value creation, design phase, architectural projects, Iceland**

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, the total building area is estimated at about 255 billion square meters, with an annual expansion of roughly 5.5 billion square meters. This growth equates to the construction of a city the size of Paris every single week (Smith et al., 2021). It is forecasted that by 2070 the building stock in developed economies will be 100 billion m2 and in developing economies, it is expected

to be 313 billion m2, not considering renovation (Zhang, Ma, Zhou, Yan, Feng, Yan, ... & Ke, 2024). The pace of rapid economic expansion drives increased investment in projects, introduces greater technological complexity, and necessitates large-scale systematic construction efforts (Han, 2021). Addressing modern challenges, such as the growing projectification of industries, requires a transformative approach to how societies shape their future (Alfreðsdóttir, 2023; Minelgaite & Hinriksdóttir, 2022). In this context, enterprise architecture emerges as a critical framework for organizations to create value, enabling them to adapt to social changes, competitive innovation, and evolving market demands (Cabrera et al., 2015). Furthermore, design methodology plays a pivotal role by blending creativity, technology, and scientific principles to advance human and environmental well-being (Alfreðsdóttir, 2023).

In this article we explore how value is created specifically in the design phase of architectural projects in Iceland. Further, we investigate generic problems in project management during the construction process and the impact of societal cultural practices (House et al., 2004) in a particular societal context of Iceland (Minelgaite, Guðmundsdóttir, Guðmundsdóttir & Stangej, 2018). Consequently, we offer insights into how the design phase can be improved to ensure added value to the construction industry in Iceland. The article is organised as follows: we first map the state of art literature, starting with generic problems in the construction process and reflect upon the consequences for the overall phases of a construction process. We then delineate how value creation combined with lean and agile management are an intrinsic part of project management in the construction industry in Iceland today.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

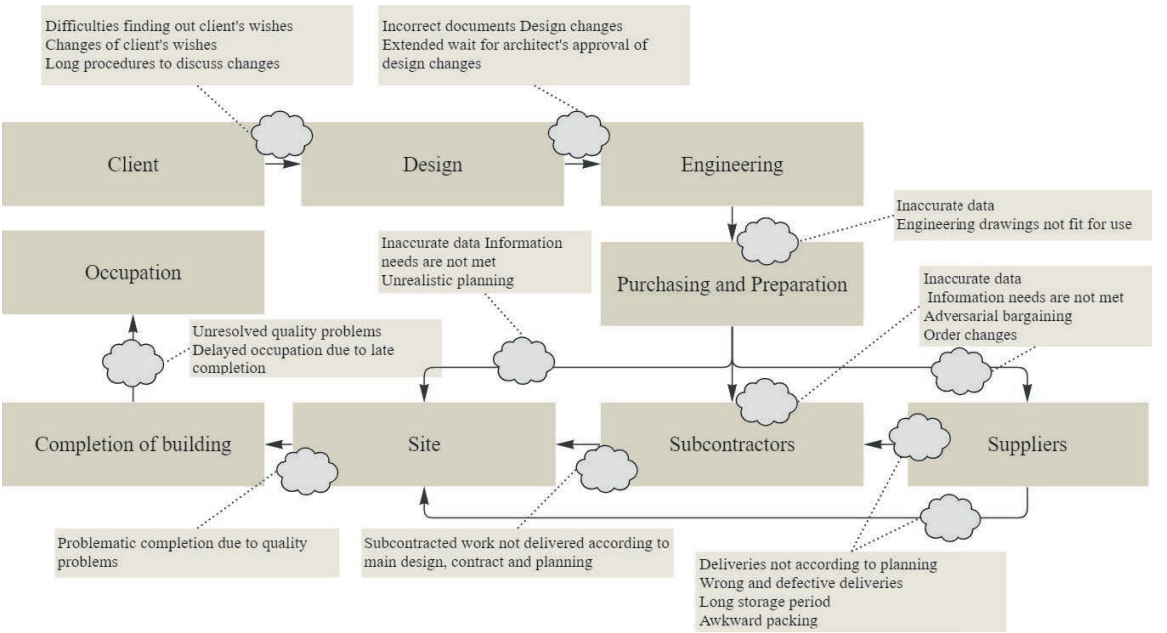
2.1 Generic Problems in the Construction Industry

Due to causal connections throughout the supply chain, two phenomena have caused the two most common generic problems, namely lack of control and declining performance (Vrijhoef, 2011). For example, in US alone there is a consistent 1% annual decline in productivity in construction sector over the past 50 years (Goolsbee and Syverson, 2023). Challenges such as diminishing control and reduced efficiency are deeply interlinked within the construction industry's supply chain (Vrijhoef, 2011). Cost overruns are prevalent, driven by unreliable methodologies and inconsistent adherence to project schedules. Compared to other manufacturing sectors, the construction industry lags in profitability, safety, and quality standards (European Commission, 2012). The sector's high degree of fragmentation and limited repetition within its supply chain create systemic inefficiencies, limiting flexibility and adaptability. These interconnected issues form a feedback loop, where one problem exacerbates another, further undermining control and overall performance (Vrijhoef, 2011). Furthermore, construction sector is behind compared with other sectors is stuck in time warp and has showed just 1% average growth during last twenty years, while manufacturing sector on average has showed 3.6% growth (McKinsey & Company, 2017).

Generic problems in the construction process can be seen in Figure 1 below. These highlight difficulties in communication with both the client, the authorities and engineers during the construction process, within an Icelandic context:

FIGURE 1

Problems in the Construction Process (Vrijhoef, 2011; Author's representation, 2023)



The success of any organization relies on its ability to generate value for its clients, incorporating both financial returns and broader non-financial benefits as key metrics for evaluation (Prashanth, 2022). Cost alone is not always an accurate measure of the quality or suitability of a service or product. The lowest-priced option does not necessarily equate to the best value; instead, it is critical to evaluate the expertise, innovation, and overall quality embedded in the offering (Ingvarsdóttir, 2015). To ensure long-term success, organizations need to strike a balance between cost considerations and a broader perspective on value. Focusing solely on cost can limit opportunities for growth, innovation, and quality, while an emphasis on value creation can drive higher levels of customer satisfaction and competitive advantage. Effective strategies

incorporate both cost efficiency and long-term value by considering factors such as product quality, customer experience, and supplier relationships (Zumente, & Bistrova, 2021).

2.2 Value Creation

Value creation is often viewed as a sequence of actions carried out by the company, forming a dynamic process focused on developing goods or services that align with the user's subjective needs and are valued by them (Vargo et al., 2008). Consequently, products and solutions must be delivered more quickly, at lower costs, and with higher quality (Van Wyngaard et al., 2012). In the construction industry, development plays a vital role in meeting the customer's demands, such as time, cost, quality, scale, resources, and safety (Winch, 2012; Yaman et al., 2022).

Value creation is commonly understood as a continuous and evolving process, where businesses engage in activities aimed at developing products or services that satisfy the changing needs of their customers. To stay competitive, companies must prioritize delivering solutions that are quicker, more affordable, and of superior quality. In the construction industry, development is crucial for meeting customer expectations, addressing factors such as time, cost, quality, scale, resources, and safety (Vargo et al., 2008; Van Wyngaard et al., 2012; Yaman et al., 2022).

Therefore, value creation can be seen as a process where companies develop products or services that meet customer needs by being faster, more cost-effective, and higher quality, with particular emphasis on development in industries like construction to meet critical requirements.

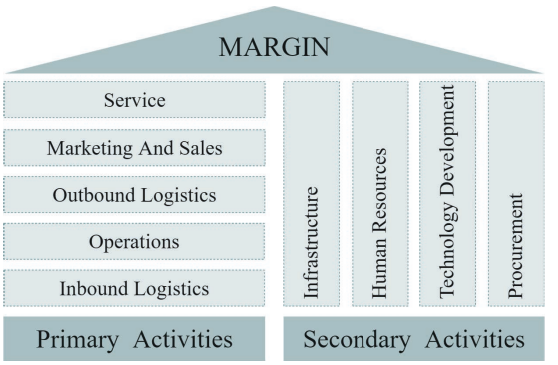
The recent wave of economic growth has led to increased investments in projects, more complex technology, and a rise in large-scale systematic projects (Ekström & Björnsson, 2003; Han, 2021). In this context, enterprise architecture becomes crucial for facilitating value creation,

enabling organizations to adapt to social changes, innovations from competitors, and shifting market demands. To maintain a competitive edge, businesses must anticipate changes in technology, client expectations, and industry standards (Cabrera et al., 2015). Even small adjustments can have significant impacts on a company's ability to secure a project (Larson & Gray, 2014). Achieving a competitive advantage requires analyzing a firm's value chain in comparison with key competitors (Mentzas, 1997).

Ultimately, a company's success hinges on its ability to deliver value to its clients, considering both financial and non-financial elements of value creation (Prashanth, 2022). Value creation is a continuous and multifaceted process, especially in today's challenging economic climate. It is achieved when the benefits a customer receives from a product or service exceed the cost of delivering it, thereby ensuring a competitive edge (Slater & Narver, 2000). According to Grönroos and Ravald (2011), the creation of customer value involves two distinct subprocesses that, together, contribute to sustainable success, as shown in Figure 2, below.

FIGURE 2

Value chain analysis by Porter (Porter, 1998; Author's representation, 2023)



A company's business model is often viewed as a framework for value creation, delivery, and capture, with value generation and appropriation occurring across an interconnected system of activities involving multiple stakeholders (Costa Climent & Haftor, 2021). These activities can explain a company's success or failure, often linked to effective project management practices (Zott et al., 2011). In value chains, industries are classified as either buyer-driven, such as consumer goods, or producer-driven, like capital-intensive sectors, with each link adding value, dependent on a player's position and their ability to create and capture value (Dai et al., 2024). External knowledge management systems play a role in enhancing this value throughout the chain (Zamora, 2016), while research consistently shows that effective project management significantly improves the likelihood of success (Chou & Yang, 2012; Besner & Hobbs, 2006). Modern projects must meet not only quality, cost, and time criteria but also contribute to the overall strategic positioning and success of the organization, shifting focus from execution to results-oriented project management (Larson & Gray, 2014). Evaluating project success traditionally relied on Barnes' iron triangle—time, cost, and quality—but now must consider broader organizational impacts, especially in high-risk, financially critical initiatives (Dennis Lock, 2007; Van Wyngaard et al., 2012).

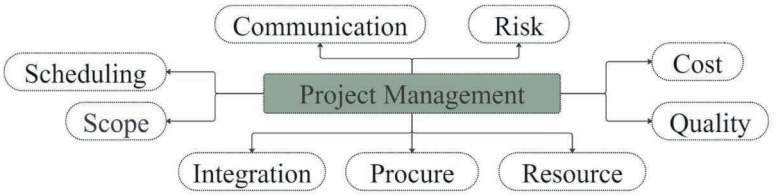
2.3 Project Management

Project management is a structured process designed to achieve specific outcomes by managing the key factors of cost, quality, and time, ultimately driving the project towards its predefined objectives (Project Management Institute, 2017). Armenia et al. (2019) emphasize that effectively balancing these elements enhances the benefits for stakeholders. By viewing the organization

holistically and integrating each component, a comprehensive vision for business transformation emerges, aligning technology with strategic priorities and customer needs (Cabrera et al., 2015). Therefore, project management involves crafting a detailed execution plan that ensures the successful achievement of the project's objectives (Larson & Gray, 2014). The following figure summarizes the nine functions of project management.

FIGURE 3

Nine functions of project management (Han, 2021; Author's representation, 2023)



Client expectations for project delivery are continuously rising, requiring organizations to strike the right balance between control at the portfolio, program, and project levels. This balance ensures the efficient use of resources, enhances flexibility, minimizes risks, and supports continuous improvement (Pitagorsky, 2006). The overarching strategy is to deliver projects on time, within budget, and in alignment with client specifications. As a result, all aspects of the project management process are interconnected and rely on each other. Projects typically fail for two main reasons: either the initial concept was flawed or, if the concept was strong, it was poorly executed (Harvey & Lucia, 2019).

2.4 Lean and Agile Methodologies in Project Management

Any study on value creation must acknowledge Lean and Agile methodologies, which are renowned for providing efficient solutions that meet both user needs and enterprise software standards (Madi et al., 2013; Patrucco, Canterino & Minelgaite, 2022). Achieving project goals requires the use of advanced measurement techniques (Baratta, 2016). Projects that involve change management evolve in dynamic environments (Larson & Gray, 2014). The development of Agile and Lean methodologies emerged as a response to the limitations of traditional project management approaches and the need for ongoing innovation across industries (Špundak, 2014). These methodologies are adaptable, accommodating changes throughout the project lifecycle and across various types of projects (Špundak, 2014).

Lean management and quality improvement philosophies, originally developed in manufacturing, focus on waste reduction and improving workplace environments while emphasizing "respect for humanity" (Pitagorsky, 2006). The term "Lean Production" was first coined by John Krafcik in 1988 in his article “The Triumph of Lean Production System” (Modig & Åhlström, 2021). These principles are applicable to a wide range of processes. As Lean practices evolve, so too must the management and communication behaviors, with high psychological safety being essential to effective supervision (Aij & Rapsaniotis, 2017; Tortorella et al., 2019; van Assen, 2018; van Dun et al., 2017).

To meet the demands of a fast-paced and ever-changing business environment, project management must evolve to quickly adapt and respond effectively to client needs. Agile Project Management (APM) offers a framework designed to address this need by enabling project man-

agers to align with modern product development realities through a set of concepts, practices, and performance metrics (Highsmith, 2009). The Agile Manifesto, introduced in 2001, challenged traditional rigid methodologies, emphasizing individual interactions, customer collaboration, product-focused development, and responsiveness to change (Annosi et al., 2017). This manifesto outlined 12 guiding principles, including early delivery of value, adaptability to changing requirements, self-organizing teams, and continuous product improvement (Annosi et al., 2017; Hennel & Rosenkranz, 2021).

One key aspect of Agile is its focus on delivering value incrementally and being adaptable to shifting customer needs (Conboy & Carroll, 2019; Karrbom Gustavsson & Hallin, 2014). However, its implementation faces challenges, including organizational constraints, process limitations, and cultural norms, which must be navigated for successful deployment (Špundak, 2014). Unlike Lean, which also emphasizes continuous improvement, Agile particularly embraces change throughout the project lifecycle (Annosi et al., 2017; Hennel & Rosenkranz, 2021). APM also supports iterative stages, enabling teams to embrace change as it arises (Špundak, 2014). The methodology encourages small, highly skilled, self-organizing teams with regular practices like sprints and daily stand-up meetings (Bäcklander, 2019; Dingsøyr et al., 2018; Mathiassen & Sandberg, 2021; Parker et al., 2015), with visual management tools like Scrum and Kanban to help track progress (Annosi et al., 2017; Dingsøyr et al., 2018; Grass et al., 2020).

Various design process maps, or plans of work, are employed globally to guide clients through the phases of briefing, design, construction, and handover. These process maps are typically set by professional institutions or industry bodies in each country (Riba, 2021). While the

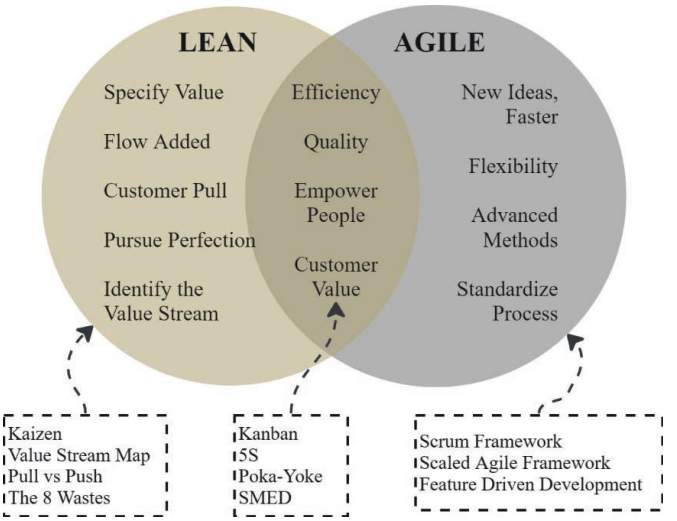
specific process maps may differ from one region to another, the core objective remains consistent: to offer a structured roadmap that ensures consistency across stages and provides essential guidance for clients, especially those embarking on their first construction project. Emphasizing the importance of clear briefings, some experts highlight the value of identifying building needs early on and using feedback from previous projects to inform these briefings (Riba, 2021).

In Iceland, certified Byggingafræðingur (Constructing Architects) work closely with architects and engineers. These professionals take on roles such as designers, project managers, and quality control officers, focusing on solving practical architectural design challenges while fostering effective teamwork and communication (Reykjavik University, 2023). The project manager in Iceland is responsible for consulting, executing, and overseeing the entire building project. Like in many other countries, personal integrity plays a crucial role in leadership and management, with a proactive attitude being essential for motivating teams through the ups and downs of the project lifecycle (Larson & Gray, 2014).

In recent years, several institutions have embraced Lean and Agile management methodologies (Lalmi et al., 2022). A common misconception among leaders is that they must choose one method over the other; however, these techniques can be highly effective when combined, amplifying their impact (Raedemaecker et al., 2020). By leveraging the strengths of both Lean and Agile, organizations can tailor their approach to specific contexts and ensure enhanced value creation.

FIGURE 4

Lean and Agile Benefits and Tools (Author's representation, 2023)



Project-based industries like construction exhibit distinct characteristics, with success generally measured by three primary criteria: quality, timing, and cost. Lean methodology in construction focuses on achieving the highest work quality with the shortest lead times and lowest costs (Al-Aomar, 2012). Traditional approaches often overlook workflow and value factors, focusing solely on process conversion. To improve efficiency and oversight, many construction firms worldwide have adopted Lean thinking, culminating in what is now recognized as Lean Construction (Liker & Morgan, 2006).

Lean Construction (LC) adapts and applies the principles of the Toyota Production System (TPS) to the construction industry (Sacks et al., 2009). The core objectives of LC are to minimize both physical and process waste (referred to as "muda" in Japanese) while enhancing the value delivered to clients (Dave et al., 2013). LC shares many fundamental principles with TPS, such as waste reduction, value enhancement, and a commitment to continuous improvement

(Sacks et al., 2009). Research indicates that adopting Lean methods can lead to cost reductions of up to 25% compared to traditional project management approaches (Al-Aomar, 2012). For instance, a study by Thomassen et al. (2003) found that 40% of the total turnover at MT Højgaard, Denmark's largest construction firm, involved projects using Lean Construction principles. While waste in construction often includes material waste, other factors such as delays, inspections, and resource transportation are sometimes overlooked (Al-Aomar, 2012). Womack & Jones (1996) further expanded the concept of waste to include goods and services that fail to meet customer needs. Yaman et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of fulfilling customer requirements across multiple dimensions, including time, cost, quality, scale, resources, and safety, which Lean Construction aims to address.

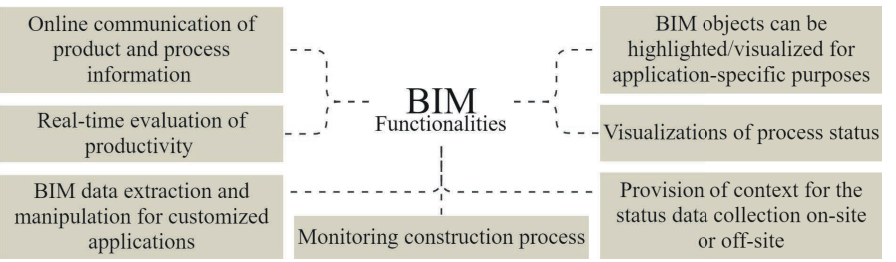
Additionally, Lean Construction promotes improved working environments and profitability for both contractors and subcontractors (Thomassen et al., 2003).
Building Information Modeling (BIM) is another collaborative methodology increasingly integrated into project management to streamline data collection, enhance coordination, and reduce inefficiencies. BIM minimizes rework, conflict, waste, and delays by managing project data before construction begins. It has demonstrated a potential to save up to 10% on construction contracts, reduce costs by 40%, and generate cost estimates in 80% less time, creating significant value for projects (BIM Ísland, 2014).

Icelandic design places a strong emphasis on sustainability, favoring the use of recycled and locally sourced materials. Drawing inspiration from the country's struggle for independence, contemporary architects and designers incorporate elements of folklore, tradition, history, and

nostalgia into their creations. Despite challenges posed by limited manufacturing capabilities, there is a strong tradition of handmade and bespoke items flourishing in the country (Icelandic Literature Center, 2011).

FIGURE 5

BIM functionalities (Schimanski et al., 2021; Author's representation, 2023)



To summarize, the literature highlights that rapid economic growth necessitates the adaptation of enterprise architecture to evolving social, cultural, and market conditions, with a strong focus on value creation and competitive advantage through customer value (Cabrera et al., 2015; Han, 2021). Effective project management plays a pivotal role in ensuring the success of organizations by balancing buyer-driven and producer-driven supply chains, monitoring project execution, and managing cost, quality, and time efficiently (Dennis Lock, 2007; Zamora, 2016). The construction sector embraces Lean and Agile methodologies to promote efficiency, reduce waste, and foster continuous improvement, with Lean focusing on process speed and cost reduction, while Agile prioritizes adaptability and self-organization (Špundak, 2014; Highsmith, 2009; Womack & Jones, 1996). Iceland's technological advancements and innovative approaches have driven its economic success, showcasing the value of strategic thinking in the construction industry (Þór, 2007). The industry's analysis incorporates methods and frameworks focused on on-site

operations, production chains, and environmental interactions (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Managerial leadership, with an emphasis on stakeholder management and resource optimization, is key to creating value and guiding organizational success (Bott et al., 2019). In Iceland, constructing architects play an essential role in design, project management, and quality control, collaborating with engineers and contractors to meet business objectives (Reykjavik University, 2023). As modern projects become increasingly complex, professionals adopt new methods, technologies, and approaches like Lean Construction and BIM to enhance performance (Sacks et al., 2009). Icelandic architecture places high value on sustainability, local materials, and cultural heritage, despite challenges in manufacturing capacity (Icelandic Literature Center, 2011).

3. METHODS

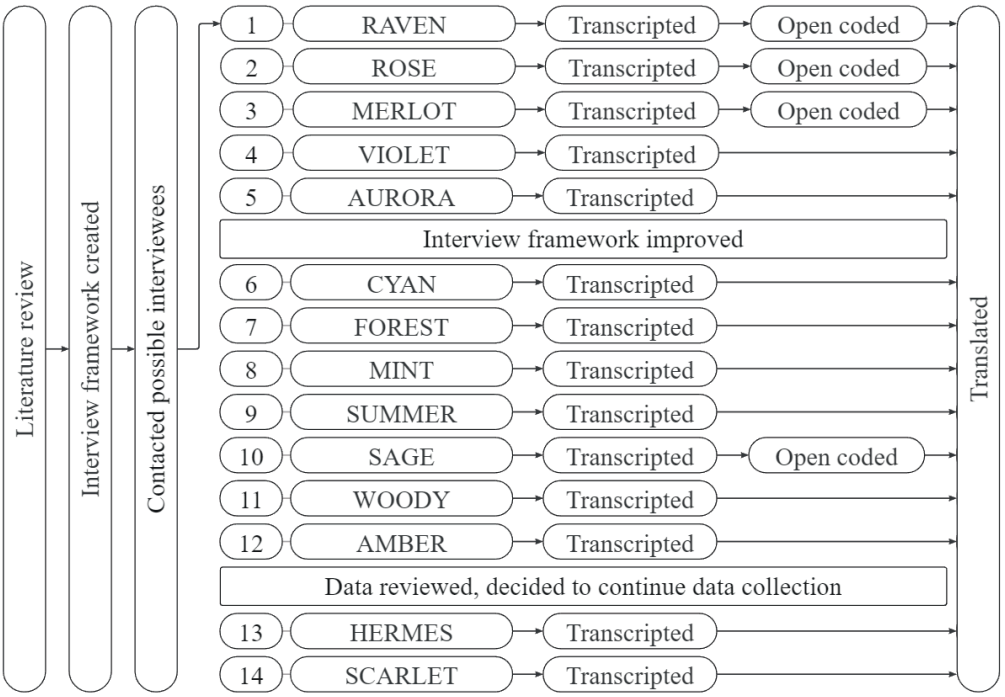
To investigate value creation during the design phase of architectural projects in Iceland, data were gathered through interviews, supplemented by document analysis in accordance with qualitative research standards (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This approach to data reflects the pragmatic worldview of the authors, where the focus is on what works and finding solution to problems (Patton, 1990), emphasizing the search of what and how to research based on the intended consequences (Creswell, 2014).

This study included fourteen in-depth interviews along with additional data collected from the websites of Icelandic design firms. The interview recordings were transcribed and subjected to open coding to identify relevant themes and address gaps in knowledge. After the fifth interview, the interview framework was refined for improved flow by reorganizing questions and

adjusting the content. Following the revision, an open-coded interview was conducted with an expert (Sage) to validate consistency with earlier findings. After completing the twelfth interview, the data were assessed, leading to the decision to conduct two additional interviews to ensure saturation was reached before finalizing the data collection process. See Figure 6. below:

FIGURE 6

Data collection (Author's representation, 2023)



Data collection and analysis are deeply intertwined, with the process of analyzing data being both time-intensive and multi-faceted (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Before beginning the open coding process, researchers must first identify the topic, problem, and data that will be analyzed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Drawing from the methodology outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008), the analysis process for this study incorporated interviews from a

range of organizations, including large, medium, and small enterprises, ensuring a broad perspective.

TABLE 1

Sample of open coding with Raven (Author's representation, 2023)

DATA	OPEN CODING	CATEGORY	THEME	FINDINGS
Raven: The reality is that the **constructing architect**, **architect** or **engineer** are just the **project's designers**. We all have equal **influence** when it comes to **managing** a project. Our only actual obligation is when the **client** comes up with an idea that **doesn't work** according to the **building regulations**. Only then is the client forced to **change his ideas**. That is solitary done so the house can have a **proper structure**, but we can not decide on our own to change any **detail only because it is ugly**. **We don't have the power** to do so.	Arch, c.arch, engr. Client Power Quality system Responsibility Obligation Regulation Final design Change	Designers Influences Time Scope Detail Knowledge	Stakeholders Value Creation Improvement	*Raven:* The reality is that the constructing architect, architect or engineer are just the project's designers. We all have equal influence when it comes to managing a project. Our only actual obligation is when the client comes up with an idea that doesn't work according to the building regulations. Only then is the client forced to change his ideas. That is solitary done so the house can have a proper structure, but we can not decide on our own to change any detail only because it is ugly. We don't have the power to do so.

Table 1 showcases examples of the open coding process, where various codes were grouped to form emerging themes. To streamline this, frequently repeated words from the numerous phrases derived from open codes were removed and organized alphabetically within each subject area. After eliminating redundant terms, 604 codes remained. These were then arranged alphabetically to maintain confidentiality and facilitate easier analysis. All terms were input into a program called Miro, where a Venn Diagram Model was used to categorize each code. Finally, the words were transferred to Excel and organized according to their respective categories.

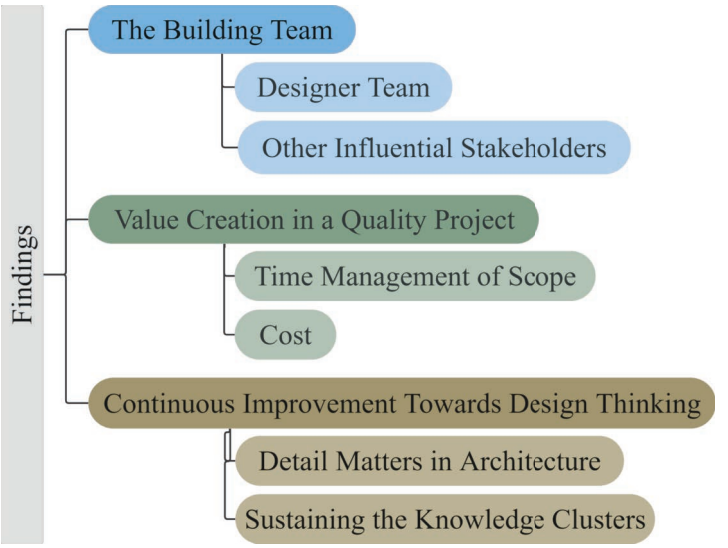
4. FINDINGS

Figure 7 illustrates the key topics and categories that emerged from the data analysis process. The "building team" theme focuses on stakeholders' involvement during interviews, which led to the identification of two subthemes: the design team and other influential stakeholders. The find-

ings indicate that value creation in a quality project is achieved within budget by prioritizing effective time management and scope control. Maintaining knowledge clusters is crucial for fostering continuous improvement in design thinking, with attention to detail being essential in evaluating architectural progress and performance.

FIGURE 7

Themes and categories – key findings from interview data



The fourteen expert interviewees, all possessing extensive knowledge, are anonymized for confidentiality in this study and assigned pseudonyms: Raven, Rose, Merlot, Violet, Aurora, Cyan, Forest, Mint, Summer, Sage, Woody, Amber, Hermes, and Scarlet. These participants are divided into two groups. The first group, called the "Classic group," consists of architects, constructing architects, or engineers working at architectural or engineering firms. The second group, referred to as the "Modern group," includes those working as coordinators, supervisors, or

holding leadership roles such as partners or CEOs. The two groups exhibit distinct approaches to building design, with the Classic group focusing more on the design process, while the Modern group, influenced by new technologies, holds more hierarchical power within their organizations. To ensure participant privacy, some names may be grouped under subcategories in the findings. A selection of interview statements is provided as part of the analysis due to space limitations; the complete set of statements is available upon request from the corresponding author.

4.1 Selected statements from respondents

The following statements selection offer valuable insights from individual respondents. The complete data from all interviews was included in the aggregate data of key elements of project management challenges in the construction industry in Iceland presented earlier in this chapter.

In Icelandic design firms, there are various types of designers involved in a project (Violet). Designers often use tools like REVIT for 3D design (Merlot) or Autocad for specific projects (Aurora). Mint noted that assembling a successful team requires understanding each person's strengths and adopting a more structured and practical approach. Their experience adds greater responsibility in ensuring proper tracking and accuracy (Mint). Amber emphasized the importance of seeking expertise from other designers to support the process. Mint shared their favorite quote: "If you want to go faster, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

In contrast to many countries, Iceland's design firms have a relatively flat hierarchical structure. The hierarchy becomes more apparent for partners, who have broader responsibilities. A typical team structure involves a project owner, an intermediary, and a junior designer, forming a cohesive group rather than a strict division of power (Mint). The first level includes junior or

intermediate designers (Cyan), who typically don't have control over company operations and receive tasks from superiors (Merlot). Their duties are relatively small and don't often include managing complex projects (Cyan). Though not in charge of project management, they manage their own tasks and divide them across days (Forest). Their technical knowledge may be on par with senior staff (Mint), and they typically handle the drawing work before passing it to the next level (Summer).

The second level consists of senior designers who manage projects with the help of junior designers or drafters (Summer). They frequently handle communication and oversee the design process under the guidance of higher-level supervisors (Mint, Rose). They bear responsibility for the project, even if the final decisions are not theirs (Mint). Whether these individuals are project or design managers can vary (Violet, Scarlet). At the top of the hierarchy are project owners or partners who often communicate directly with clients and oversee the project (Aurora, Cyan).

Architects in Iceland play a central role in project management once the design phase is complete. They are responsible for involving other designers and identifying necessary stakeholders (Rose). Architects, whether working for an architectural firm or independently, are involved in all stages of a project—from initial concept to final construction drawings (Woody, Cyan). They ensure compliance with regulations, submit data to authorities, and manage the design's execution (Cyan). Intermediate architects often supervise the project rather than directly manage it, although their responsibilities may occasionally include aspects of project management (Woody).

Constructing architects coordinate closely with designers, creating drawings for various project phases, including construction and modifications (Raven, Forest). Their duties often extend to tendering, inspections, and ensuring sustainability on-site or in the office, covering environmental certifications, biological analyses, and carbon footprints (Violet). They also handle technical solutions, cost estimates, and project documentation (SAGE). Structural designers focus on creating and managing building elements, ensuring structural integrity and regulatory compliance (Summer).

Designers in the project are not typically required to create a time schedule (Mint). While they may act as project managers, their roles often don't carry the official title (Violet). Project management usually involves assistants or coordinators (Amber). The success of project management depends on experience, leadership skills, and the ability to make timely decisions. In the design phase, it is essential to involve other designers at the right moments to avoid unnecessary meetings and only implement changes after receiving adequate feedback. The goal is to lead the project in a way that ensures success at the design stage, avoiding constant complaints (Rose).

Project managers handle procurement, which includes classifying data, managing drawing numbers, and organizing folders. The most important task for a project manager is setting clear requirements and effectively communicating them to the designers, rather than being involved in every stage of the design process (Amber). A project manager is typically at the top of the hierarchy (Raven), taking a significant role in managing and planning the project (Forest). They have a vision of what needs to be done and how to accomplish it (Raven). Effective communication with customers and contractors is key to managing the overall project (Merlot, Sum-

mer). As such, project managers must possess excellent communication skills and the ability to manage various aspects of the project (Raven).

Project managers should not be tasked with the design work itself (Rose). They are responsible for setting up bids and budgets, tracking costs, ensuring the project meets its requirements, and that the design is completed on time (Aurora). In architectural projects, project management is a natural process, starting with a job request and a submitted work plan. Tools such as schedules, design plans, and progress monitoring are used to guide the project forward, whether in-house or outsourced (Hermes).

In-house project management within architectural firms tends to focus on professional aspects rather than team management (Amber). Managers typically have a basic understanding of project management and employ systems like master plans for larger projects, as well as moderators and collaborators to identify areas for improvement in work processes (Woody). Mint highlighted that the term "project manager" is not frequently used in the industry, even when someone is performing the role. Mint also emphasized the importance of a project manager overseeing projects to ensure compliance with regulations. Although project managers have decision-making authority, the hierarchy may not always be clearly defined. Mint suggested that a design director could approve projects from the outset, rather than relying on day-to-day workers to make such decisions, seeing this as a more efficient system.

Project management in architecture is increasingly being led by the lead designer. Various factors contribute to this shift, with the limited number of highly experienced professionals in the field also playing a role (Sage). Lead designers initiate and assign tasks, while design managers

or managing partners oversee the work. Due to the vast scope of projects, they cannot manage every aspect themselves, so tasks are delegated to administrators who report to the project manager. While most decisions are administrative, project managers retain control over those that affect the appearance or cost of the project (Scarlet). Project owners are responsible for signing off on drawings and securing warranty insurance (Mint). Supervisors may vary in their time management styles and approaches, with some focusing more on strict deadlines while others emphasize quality and output. Not all supervisors are formally trained in project management (Cyan). If a project is not handled well, the project manager's involvement can sometimes cause more harm than good (Summer).

A typical architecture project team may consist of an architect, interior designer, constructing architect, and 3D designer. Clients or project owners often bring in additional experts, such as BIM consultants and engineers (Forest). In most cases, the primary stakeholders are the clients, though there have been instances where the firm has taken on part ownership or shares of the project (Summer).

The project buyer typically handles project management (Rose) and holds the ultimate authority (Mint). The buyer's primary concerns are managing time and meeting deadlines (Mint). They must ensure accurate assumptions are made and track the progress of projects (Woody). As the project evolves and more details are worked out, client involvement and decision-making typically decrease, which can sometimes create bottlenecks (Merlot). The CEO of a design firm oversees project progress, ensuring that all teams work toward improving the project and creating new products for clients (Woody). Architects are responsible for making sure all elements of

the project align, ensuring that client needs and desires are met while considering design, fabrication, and construction requirements (Cyan).

At the start of a project, a project plan is usually developed, often by engineering firms or contractors (Sage). Contractors dominate the Icelandic AEC sector, holding significant influence and control (Raven). The role of project management is to ensure that key milestones are met, allowing the contractor to submit a work plan that aligns with the project's goals. In a typical project management scenario, a contractor may prepare a work plan for a residential project aimed for completion in two years. Initially, the contractor may be uncertain about meeting the goal and propose a slower start, with additional personnel brought in after six months. This gradual approach is practical and increasingly common in modern projects (Sage). Contractors with construction expertise and an understanding of blueprints are essential for the success of a project. In particular, workers with limited English proficiency may need additional time to fully grasp the drawings (Forest).

On large projects, the contractor's team consists mainly of their own employees, though certain workers may be engaged elsewhere and unavailable to the project. The key factor for timely delivery is the size of the crew working on the project, which may include contractors, subcontractors, or employees not directly involved in the project (Sage).

Most participants viewed the main stakeholders as the firm partners or individuals with significant financial influence, or as one participant succinctly put it, "Stakeholders are the ones who pay the bill" (Scarlet).

The construction process follows several stages, from initial plans to pre-design, master plans, project drawings, and tender documents. Structure, oversight, and supervision are vital, with professional and general management being the most comprehensive stages. This process is continuous, with documentation and construction sometimes occurring simultaneously in Icelandic projects (Cyan). However, performance reviews are rarely conducted through a formal quality system, and the end of the project often lacks a "lessons learned" assessment. Instead, decisions are made based on intuition rather than a final report or formal evaluation (Scarlet). While some participants suggested that a competitive phase could be beneficial, it is not typically part of the process (Rose). Most participants also had limited experience with the project's closing phase, which is generally considered an insurance matter.

5. DISCUSSION

The main goals of this research were to explore how value is generated in the design phase of architectural projects in Iceland and to deepen the understanding of project management structures within the AEC industry. The study aimed to evaluate the current state of project management in Iceland's AEC sector, with a focus on its contribution to long-term growth and continuous improvement, while highlighting how value creation unfolds during the design phase.

Organizational architecture is vital for staying competitive in the face of social shifts, market demands, and innovations (Cabrera et al., 2015). This aligns with the interview findings, which indicate that the architecture market in Iceland is highly competitive, with firms striving to be the best. According to the participants, value is often measured in financial terms (Franzen &

Mader, 2022), and finance is one of the three primary tools for assessing success and performance. The second tool identified is time, with participants agreeing that successful projects are delivered on time and within budget. As Project Management Institute (2017) notes, project management focuses on achieving results based on cost, quality, and time, all of which are crucial for maximizing stakeholder benefits (Armenia et al., 2019). Quality, the third key factor identified, is also essential in determining project success.

The findings further emphasize that project management in architecture is integral, with designers often taking on the role of project managers. These professionals oversee the project, communicate with clients, contractors, and stakeholders, manage bids, create budget estimates, and monitor costs. Successful project management involves excellent communication, ensuring that the design is delivered on time, and setting clear requirements. In-house project management within architectural firms focuses more on the professional field, with team managers working together to improve processes. Project owners, often lead designers, are responsible for scoping, specifying, tendering, and managing quality. Although decision-making is typically administrative, decisions that impact the project's appearance or cost remain under the control of the project manager. Time management styles among supervisors can vary, and in some cases, the project manager’s interference can hinder rather than help the project.

The success of a project depends on balancing time, cost, and quality. Clear scope management is also critical, though not all participants highlighted it as a defining factor of success. Effective time management, scope definition, and a well-structured communication system are necessary for success. Over-communication is preferred to ensure everyone is aligned with the

project's goals. Financially, a successful project is measured by key figures in annual reports and the intangible quality of the work, as well as client satisfaction. Long-term success is reflected in both the design's conceptual integrity and the company's position within the competitive landscape.

Construction project success hinges on selecting the most appropriate project management methodology (Špundak, 2014). Lean and Agile methods have proven effective in improving project performance (Raedemaecker et al., 2020), with Lean focusing on value creation through waste reduction and efficiency (Conboy, 2009; Dal Forno et al., 2016), while Agile emphasizes flexibility and compliance (Conboy & Carroll, 2019; Karrbom Gustavsson & Hallin, 2014). The Modern group is familiar with these methodologies, though not all understand them fully. Government projects often utilize these methods, and tools like Franklin Covey's WIG are employed to track progress. Time tracking on drawings remains a challenge, especially considering varying levels of project complexity across firms.

Efficient project management is essential for ensuring the longevity of buildings, particularly in smaller projects, where financial control is more manageable. Project management tools such as MS Project, BIM, Trello, and others are vital for streamlining workflows. A smooth quality system is necessary for maintaining consistency across all project phases, and systems like ISO or building regulation-compliant plans are often used to standardize processes. In-house meetings, such as Scrum, can enhance productivity, but company changes and poor data collaboration may reduce their effectiveness. While the Modern group utilizes Lean and Agile methodologies, the Classic group tends not to use specific methodologies, relying instead on established

processes. BIM is used for drawing and communication, but its effectiveness depends on the staff's familiarity with the software. Despite these challenges, the development of project management practices in Iceland's AEC sector is moving in a positive direction, with increasing reliance on technology and regular communication to ensure smoother project delivery.

A project's success hinges on clear objectives, structured communication, and seamless collaboration. A well-managed project not only meets its goals but also contributes significantly to the urban landscape. The project development process begins with the involvement of buyers, contractors, and key stakeholders, followed by decisions, detailed planning, and final execution. Frequent workforce turnover can disrupt the flow of information, extending timelines and increasing costs. Ambiguity in the project's scope can lead to delays and unexpected financial burdens for the firm. The process itself can be intricate and unpredictable, with external factors and third-party influences sometimes delaying the final design. A smaller, more cohesive team with efficient task management is vital for ensuring a project's success. Productivity is measured by completing the work at a lower cost than the initial estimate, factoring in both labor and operational expenses. The construction process unfolds in several stages, with ongoing monitoring, supervision, and structural organization being critical throughout the lifecycle. However, there is no formal "lesson learned" phase at the end of the project.

The study also reveals the complex network of internal and external stakeholders in an AEC industry firm. Key players include design teams, contractors, BIM consultants, and government entities, all of whom influence the project. Typically, an architectural firm's team comprises an architect, interior designer, constructing architect, and 3D designer, with additional staff

brought in by the client or project owner. Project management is typically led by the buyer, while the CEO oversees overall progress and ensures teams remain focused on improving project outcomes. Contractors dominate the Icelandic AEC market, ensuring milestones are met and work plans are submitted. BIM consultants ensure the design is coordinated, while government bodies manage projects and enforce quality standards. The success of a project is shaped by the interplay between contractors, buyers, project managers, and other decision-makers. The project is segmented into phases, with contractors handling procurement and state companies often involved through framework agreements.

The managerial implications of this research are outlined as follows: The hierarchy within Icelandic design firms is relatively flat, consisting of three distinct levels. The first level includes junior or intermediate designers with limited hands-on experience and knowledge of construction technology. The second level features more experienced professionals who typically manage projects, often under the guidance of supervisors. At the top level, project owners or partners take charge of the design process. Junior and intermediate-level staff work on a daily basis, while the project owners provide strategic advice and oversight. When asked about the company's vision or mission, most participants were either unable or unwilling to respond, largely because they were unaware of it. This lack of understanding, particularly in relation to stakeholders, is attributed to limited knowledge of project management concepts. Despite this gap in understanding, many of these participants are still functioning in project management roles.

6. CONCLUSION

Value is inherently contextual and experiential, shaped by the specific needs and perspectives of stakeholders in the Icelandic construction industry today. According to interviewees, the construction industry is largely controlled by clients and contractors, with the buyer's vision often driving creativity rather than the design team's input. This contrasts with Frank Gehry's famous assertion: "I don't know why people hire architects and then tell them what to do." Time management is closely tied to financial performance in the AEC industry, exemplified by David Chipperfield's quote, "The difference between good and bad architecture is the time you spend on it." However, both time and cost estimates are often imprecise, as reflected by Maya Lin's observation: "For the most part, things never get built the way they were drawn." Designers, including architects, constructing architects, and engineers, serve as consultants for project owners and clients. As Mies van der Rohe famously stated, "Less is more," with small architectural details contributing to the overall picture. Frank Lloyd Wright also noted, "A doctor can bury his mistakes, but an architect can only advise his clients to plant vines," highlighting how a building's long-term stability reveals the quality of its design.

One major mistake many firms in Iceland make is misusing resources, particularly failing to deploy the right talent at the right time. This leads to uncertainty about the firm's future. Poor communication between management and the team often results in unclear project scopes. Designers, known for their creativity and innovation, may experience reduced productivity when the process is too dry or complex. Leonardo da Vinci's principle that "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication" reflects the need for straightforward processes. Lean and Agile methodologies,

which could streamline both public and private projects, are not yet widely adopted in Iceland. As Louis Kahn put it, "Architecture is the reaching out for the truth." The truth is that Iceland's architectural culture is relatively young and chaotic, which could lead to mismatched demand and supply in the economy. Lead designers with substantial experience hold the key to a project's success, while managers without project management education can negatively affect quality control and contingency planning.

Understanding the effectiveness of project management and integrating knowledgeable project managers can help eliminate wasteful practices and promote more efficient work processes in Icelandic projects. Meeting these requirements would maximize benefits and align supply and demand in the Icelandic economy. Innovation has transformed Iceland's economy from poverty to one of the wealthiest in the world, and maintaining this position requires sustaining knowledge clusters for continuous improvement. Future research should further explore these findings.

Lastly, respondents in the construction industry highlighted traditional communication and leadership norms in Iceland, such as informal management, unclear hierarchies, and ad hoc communication patterns. In an environment facing constant digital transformation, adopting digital tools could provide a competitive advantage. Companies should invest in upskilling programs to add value. Globally, the construction industry faces challenges like cost overruns, fragmentation, and low repetition, which can undermine control and performance. Since the industry’s success depends on its ability to deliver value to stakeholders, incorporating both financial and non-financial value creation through effective project management and stakeholder communication is

crucial. Software tools can enhance performance, improve quality control, and promote sustainability. Future research should continue this exploration within a broader empirical context.

Acknowledgement:

This article is partially based on the master's thesis of the corresponding author and permission has been granted to re-print some sections of the thesis within this article.

This article is partially supported by research fund of University of Iceland, within the framework of Projectif-WHY research project.

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