



UNIVERSITY OF  
GOTHENBURG

# THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE THROUGH A SPATIAL LENS

A qualitative study exploring the employee experience  
in an automotive organisation

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Thesis:	30 hp
Program:	M.Sc. Strategic Human Resource Management & Labour Relations
Level:	Second Cycle
Semester:	Spring 2023
Supervisor:	Monica Andersson Bäck
Examiner:	Anna Hedenus

# Abstract

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Purpose: The purpose of this study is to obtain a holistic understanding of the employee experience by applying Lefebvre's Spatial Triad as an analytical tool, as well as to contextually visualise the concept of the employee experience and its characteristics.

Theory: The data collection is guided by the dimensions of Lefebvre Spatial Triad, which are the conceived space, the perceived space, and the lived space. The theoretical concept by Lefebvre allows for exploring the employee experience from a holistic and integrated perspective.

Method: The study employs a qualitative case study methodology. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with 14 engineers from different departments and levels of a Swedish automotive organisation.

Result: The factors that are most prominent in characterising the employee experience of the case organisation in this study are related to social aspects, a supportive atmosphere among colleagues and management, as well as stress and workload. Further, the elements of the lived space are dependent on and created as a result of the designs within the perceived and conceived space. The results of this study illustrate a holistic, integrated and complete portrayal of the employee experience in the case organisation, providing HR practitioners with a better understanding of how the factors of an employee experience interplay and impact each other, and how to apply the Lefebvre Spatial Triad as an analytical tool.

## Foreword

I am happy to finally share my master's thesis - The Employee Experience Through a Spatial Lens. Conducting this thesis project has allowed me to delve into a topic I am interested in and investigate its complexities. I've been lucky to have support, inspiration, and guidance from several people along this process, without whom this work would not have been possible.

Firstly, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor from the University of Gothenburg - Monica Andersson Bäck. Your guidance and expertise have been of the greatest value to me during this process.

Additionally, I want to extend my sincere gratitude to the case organisation's members and the HR team. This thesis could not have been completed in the manner described here without your support, guidance, and encouragement. I sincerely appreciate you giving me this opportunity.

I must also express my gratitude to my fellow classmates, who have helped improve the quality of this thesis with their perceptive feedback, critical assessment, and useful ideas.

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# 1. Introduction

This chapter starts by presenting the concept of the employee experience, the definitions of an experience in general, and its background within the business world and the academic world. Henceforth, the chapter outlines a brief introduction to the theoretical approach undertaken in this study, followed by an introduction to the case organisation, a problem discussion, as well as the research purpose and the research questions. Lastly, the delimitations of the study are presented and end by presenting the outline of the thesis.

## 1.1 Background

The term “employee experience” refers to all facets of an employee’s interaction with their employer, including recruitment, onboarding, everyday work, and career advancement opportunities. A satisfying experience is essential for attracting and retaining desired employees, increasing output, and fostering corporate success (Tucker, 2020). In recent years, organisations have started to place a greater emphasis on the idea and concept of the employee experience and started to develop employee-centric cultures that put growth, well-being, and engagement as top priorities (Tucker, 2020). Research exploring the concept of employee experience is yet limited, and the question arises whether it is just another fashionable term within human resource management (HRM)?

### 1.1.1 The Employee Experience

Scholars explain that the approach regarding employee experience is to a large extent inspired by the concept of customer experience, which is rooted in branding and marketing theory, in which the focus is founded on the needs of the customers (Plaskoff, 2017; Batat, 2022). Tucker (2020) emphasises that the advancements in technology and analytics have led to a more responsive, personalised, and seamless consumer experience. In a similar vein, employers aim to deliver a certain level of service and offerings to their employees, to enhance engagement and retain them.

The notion of employee experience has been increasingly embraced within strategic HRM in recent years. Scholars have focused on conducting literature reviews and developing frameworks for the employee experience, while fewer case studies have been carried out on the topic (Plaskoff, 2017; Batat, 2022). Additionally, the term employee experience is often explored in conjunction with a particular phenomenon, such as the employee experience of working remotely (Lemon, 2019; Prouska et al., 2022; Oakman, 2022). The idea of the employee experience is often mentioned in the same context as employee engagement (Lemon, 2019), and also mentioned as a tool for enhancing employee engagement (Tucker, 2020). Tucker (2020) implies that employee experience is another HR fad and yet another employee engagement approach. However, few attempts have been made to provide a holistic understanding of the employee experience.

### **1.1.2 Employer Branding and Job Washing**

Employer branding activities, initiatives, and strategies are nowadays undeniably a part of any modern organisation, and employer branding is recognised as associated with enhanced firm performance, through thoughtful investments in human capital (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). A crucial aspect in terms of the employer branding strategy of organisations concerns developing an employee value proposition (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Sengupta et al., 2015). That is, organisations encompass the values and offerings that employees are subject to if they would become a part of the organisation. Sengupta et al. (2015) explain that the employee value proposition is a marketing concept that can be applied to the employer-employee relationship. By aligning the value proposition with potential employees' values and needs, successful employer branding efforts can lead to talent attraction and retention.

Drawing on the aforementioned, having a successful strategy regarding employer branding may result in competitive advantages for organisations (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Sengupta et al., 2015; Vatsa, 2016). Vatsa (2016) further describes that successful employer branding strategies may result in lower recruitment turnover rates, more quality applicants, and lower recruitment costs. However, for employer branding strategies and activities to be successful, the internal and external employer branding statements have to be aligned. In other words, the promises stated through the external employer brand have to be true also internally (Vatsa,

2016). If the organisation does not fulfil its promise, the workplace might appear as beautified or elated, a phenomenon which more recently can be referred to as “job washing”.

Alongside the increased popularity of working strategically with the employer brand, an escalation in the so-called “Best place to work lists” has appeared. However, these lists are subject to a flurry of criticism (Vanderkam, 2011). According to Vanderkam (2011), the lists may be subject to manipulation, and companies may prioritise popular benefits over crucial aspects such as salaries, work-life balance, and career growth in an effort to improve rankings on these lists. Drawing on the aforementioned, Vanderkam (2011) emphasises that while the lists may be helpful, they should not be determining factors in evaluating a workplace. If the promises made through the external employer branding activities, for example, “Best place to work lists” do not adhere to the internal brand, there might be a risk of job washing.

### **1.1.3 The Case Organisation**

This study is conducted within a case organisation operating in the automotive industry. The organisation is multinational, with approximately 6000 employees globally, and approximately 900 employees in Sweden. This study is conducted within the Swedish part of the organisation, which has an overall strategic goal is to become “the best Swedish employer”. One of the activities related to this strategic goal is to improve the employee experience within the organisation.

One of the largest occupational groups within the organisation is engineers, allocated across different departments and levels in the organisation. Also, there are several support functions within the organisation, both on a global and on a local level, such as HR, IT, and Finance, among others. Globally, the organisation operates in eleven countries, having six production plants. In Sweden, there are three tech-sites, which in this study are referred to as tech-site 1, tech-site 3, and tech-site 3, and one production plant, which in this study is referred to as the production plant. The production plant in Sweden entails both blue- and white-collar workers, whereby blue-collar workers constitute the majority. The gender distribution within the Swedish part of the organisation is roughly 30 percent women and 70 percent men, and the average age is approximately 41 years.



#### **1.1.4. Experiences and the Production of Space**

According to the American Psychological Association (2023), an experience can be defined as “an event that is actually lived through, as opposed to one that is imagined or thought about.” (American Psychological Association, 2023). Experiences are explored in different contexts, both in the business world and the academic world. For this study, the theoretical concept of “Lefebvre’s Spatial Triad” is applied in order to explore the notion of the employee experience from a different theoretical perspective, which will be further presented in Chapter 3. According to Lefebvre (1991), an experience is constructed by an individual's subjective understanding of and interaction with a particular place, space, or environment. An experience is not just a matter of perception but is shaped by the individual's history, culture, and social context, as well as the physical characteristics of the environment. Experiences are dynamic and constantly evolving, and they play a crucial role in shaping our perceptions of the world and our sense of place (Lefebvre, 1991). For this study, I rely on the definitions of an experience presented above.

#### **1.1.5 Problem Discussion**

The recognition of the employee experience as a strategic tool within HRM has increased in recent years (Plaskoff, 2017; Batat, 2022). Although, fewer case studies have been conducted within the field, and research has instead centred around conducting literature reviews on the phenomenon, or exploring the term in relation to another field, such as the employee experience of working remotely (Lemon, 2019; Prouska et al., 2022; Oakman, 2022).

As described in section 1.1.3, one of the strategic goals of the case organisations is to become the best Swedish employer, through, among other aspects, improving the employee experience within the organisation. The increased recognition of the importance of working strategically with employer branding has posed challenges for both employers and employees in terms of being true to what is promised by the employer through the employer brand, and avoiding job washing. Vanderkam (2011) highlights the issues of the “Best place to work lists”, as they can be easily manipulated by companies who may focus on popular benefits to improve their rankings on these lists. Building on this, Vanderkam (2011) emphasises that although such lists can provide valuable insights, they should not be the sole criteria for assessing a workplace as a potential employee. Drawing on the aforementioned, my thoughts are centred

toward the question; what determines whether a workplace is desirable for a potential or existing employee if not the actual experience of working there?

Few attempts have been made to explore the phenomenon of the employee experience from a holistic perspective through a theoretical lens such as the one of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad, nor are there few known examples of contextual visualisation and problematization empirically investigating the concept. This study departs from previous research within the field of employer branding, and will instead build further on the contributions within the field of the employee experience, although in a new context - empirically and theoretically, through the lens of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad.

## 1.2 Research Purpose and Research Questions

As previously highlighted, the concept of the employee experience has not yet been studied to a large extent, and scholars have provided different perspectives on the phenomena. For example, Tucker (2020) implies the notion is just another HR fad, while Batat (2022) suggests a framework of the concept that can be used as an HRM tool. In contrast, the purpose of this study is to obtain a holistic understanding of the employee experience by applying Lefebvre's Spatial Triad as an analytical tool, as well as to contextually visualise the concept of the employee experience and its characteristics.

The study departs from previous research and theoretical applications and will hereby explore the concept of the employee experience from a new contextual perspective, as well as from a different theoretical perspective. The study aims to contribute both theoretically and empirically. Empirically, by providing insights for HR practitioners and HRM in terms of how to obtain a holistic understanding of the employee experience. Theoretically, by illustrating how the model of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad can be applied as a tool for analysing the employee experience in an organisation.

To achieve this, a qualitative case study is conducted in an automotive organisation, in which semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 individuals. The sample consists of employees with an occupational position related to engineering, purposely sampled from different departments and levels of the Swedish part of the organisation. The data collection is

guided by the dimensions of the Lefebvre Spatial Triad presented in Chapter 3, and serves as a foundation for the interview guide, presented in Appendix A, together with previous research within the field. To fulfil the purpose of this study, the research questions are as follows;

**Research Question 1:** What factors are most prominent in characterising the employee experience in an organisation?

**Research Question 2:** How do the factors interplay and impact each other?

### 1.3 Delimitations

For this study to be well-defined, some delimitations have been determined. Firstly, the sample of this study are employees from the Swedish part of the organisation, having a similar educational background and a similar profession, which may indicate that the results are related to the particular sample and context. Another delimitation of this study is that it does not explore differences or similarities between gender, age, ethnicity, background, or any other demographic factors of the employees within the Swedish part of the organisation. Exploring other groups or contexts is beyond the scope of this study and is left for future studies.

Further, it should be noted that this study does not explore employer branding or job washing, although there may be some similarities in terms of exploring certain attributes. Instead, the study focuses on the term and concept of the employee experience. While employer branding and job washing may be relevant to the topic, they are not the main focus of the study.

Lastly, it is mentioned that the study aims to provide insights to HR practitioners and HRM as a field, although, I acknowledge that there may be other stakeholders benefiting from the results of this study.

## 1.4 Disposition

The purpose of this study is to obtain a holistic understanding of the employee experience by applying Lefebvre's Spatial Triad as an analytical tool, as well as to contextually visualise the concept of the employee experience and its characteristics. To answer the research questions of this study, the reader is first introduced to the subject of employee experience and its background. The introductory parts of the literature constitute information about the creation of experiences and the concept of customer experience since much of the literature in terms of the employee experience has its foundation within these concepts. Further, literature regarding the employee experience is presented as well as literature regarding important aspects of working life. Further, the reader is introduced to the theoretical considerations of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad, which serves as an essential component of this study.

Following the literature review and theoretical considerations, the methodological chapter is presented, including the approach and design of the research. The sampling strategy, interview design, and data collection method are described, followed by the analytical approach. Lastly, validity and reliability are outlined, and concluded by presenting the ethical considerations of the study.

Succeeding the introductory parts, the results and analysis of the study are presented following a discussion, which sets the foundation for exploring and evaluating the research questions. Lastly, the conclusions of the study are presented, providing empirical and theoretical insights and contributions, as well as suggestions for future research.

## 2. Previous Research

Experiences are explored in different contexts, both in the business world and various fields of academia. And as mentioned in the introductory chapter, an experience can be defined as “an event that is actually lived through, as opposed to one that is imagined or thought about.” (American Psychological Association, 2023). In this chapter, previous research within the field of creating experiences is presented, starting with a general description of how experience creation has been present in the business world. Further, an outline of previous research on creating customer experiences is outlined, since the concept of the employee experience is much inspired by the concept of the customer experience. Lastly, previous research and studies on the topic of the employee experience are presented.

### 2.1 Creating Experiences

Creating experiences is not a new phenomenon, however, experience creation in the business world has to a wide extent been focused on the aspects of creating customer experiences (Batat, 2022; Plaskoff, 2017). Scholars highlight that creating experiences is a process that involves several aspects, such as the design of the physical space, the design of services, and the management of customer interactions. For example, Pine and Gilmore (2011) explore the concept of experience and its significance in the economy. The authors refer to the Experience Economy, a concept by which the main idea implies that experiences have become the most valuable offering that organisations can provide to customers in a service-dominant economy. Additionally, Pine and Gilmore (2011) emphasise that experiences may be created, controlled, and marketed as commodities or products that are differentiated and customised to give the customer a unique and unforgettable experience. The authors further emphasise that experiences are co-created between the customer and the organisation, with the customer being an active participant in the experience creation process, and that both the physical environment, actors, and context are essential aspects in the creation of an experience. Organisations may, for instance, boost client loyalty if they are successful in terms of differentiating themselves through the use of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2011).

Apart from the abovementioned, there are several concepts related to the notion of creating experiences. For example, the concept of Emotional Branding refers to the emotional connection between customers and a brand in order to create a stronger, more loyal customer base (Efrat & Asseraf, 2019). Efrat and Asseraf (2019) argue that companies, in today's globalised world, can gain competitive advantages by engaging in emotional branding. Other concepts concerned with the creation of experiences are Place Branding and Sensory Marketing (Campelo, 2017; Hulten, 2011). Place Branding is a process concerned with improving a location's reputation and image to attract visitors, talents, businesses, and residents (Campelo, 2017). Sensory Branding is concerned with appealing to customers' senses to create a more engaging and memorable experience (Hulten, 2011). Hulten (2011) argues that by using sensory stimuli, companies can create a more memorable, emotional, and consistent brand experience, leading to improved brand perception, loyalty, and performance.

Another concept that explores the aspects of creating experiences is Service Design. Service Design can be described as the process of designing and managing touchpoints between an organisation and its customers in order to create positive experiences (Stickdorn et al., 2018). The authors highlight the importance of a human-centred approach in service design, emphasising the need to understand the needs, behaviours, and motivations of customers and stakeholders. Stickdorn et al. (2018) also discuss the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and co-creation, where the designers of the work together with other specialists within the organisation.

## 2.2 Customer Experience

Building further on the notions presented in the previous section, the term customer experience has its standpoint in the need of managing the customer experience efficiently to achieve customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010; Pullman & Gross, 2004; Wani, Malhotra, & Clark, 2021). The scholarly field of customer experience has centred around conceptualising the term and providing frameworks and models on how to design the best possible experiences for customers. Several models and frameworks make use of the same insights as the authors mentioned in the previous section, in which aspects of designing experience-centric services aim to achieve emotional engagement among customers (Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010).

Additionally, recent studies within the field highlight the importance of customers co-creating their experiences (Wani, Malhotra, & Clark, 2021). The aforementioned indicates a shift towards allowing customers to participate in creating their own experiences to achieve customer loyalty. This is in contrast to older studies where the role of the customer in creating the customer experience has been rather passive (Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010; Pullman & Gross, 2004).

## 2.3 Employee Experience

The approach regarding the employee experience is to a large extent inspired by the concept of the customer experience, in which the employees are considered the customers (Batat, 2022; Plaskoff, 2017). The concept itself is rather novel within HRM, where fewer studies have been exploring the concept as a whole as well as the meaning and implications for HRM and organisations (Laiho, Saru, & Seeck, 2022).

The term employee experience has been discussed in previous studies, although much of the research has explored employee experience related to a particular area (Prouska et al., 2022; Lemon, 2019; Oakman et al., 2022). For example, Prouska et al. (2022) explore how employees experience the possibility to raise their voices, while Oakman et al. (2022) focus on the employee experience of working remotely. Lemon (2019) explores how employees make sense of employee engagement, and highlights that employee engagement includes elements of co-creation, although with a focus on different types of communication and how that impacts the level of employee engagement. The aforementioned highlights that the term employee experience has been used in academia and business for a while. Although, the term seems to have gained new meaning in recent years.

Scholars have started to conceptualise the employee experience and its implications for HRM, and studies have shifted towards a more integrated view of the employee experience, and provide frameworks and concepts as tools for HRM (Batat, 2022; Plaskoff, 2017). For example, Batat (2022) provides a framework for the employee experience in which it is suggested that organisations should work with the employee experience based on three foundational pillars - personal entities, social entities, and cultural entities. Within the first

pillar - personal entities - elements such as well-being, career development opportunities, the physical and mental health related to the work situation, and overall job satisfaction are highlighted as aspects to consider. For the second pillar - social entities - aspects such as the relationships with colleagues and the relationship with the manager are considered. Also, other psychosocial as well as physical aspects are considered. The third and final pillar - the cultural entities - highlights the values, norms, and beliefs of the organisation and their impact on the employee experience. This involves creating a strong and inclusive company culture, promoting ethical behaviour and values, and aligning company practices with the needs and values of employees. Batat (2022) suggests that it is important to consider all three pillars to gain a comprehensive understanding and approach to how to work with the employee experience.

On a slightly different note, Plaskoff (2017) explores the concept of the employee experience implying the importance of employees co-designing their experiences. The aforementioned draws on similar findings as the literature regarding the customer experience and the importance of customers co-creating their experiences. Plaskoff (2017) also emphasises that the process of co-designing the experience is just as important as the end product. Furthermore, the author suggests that the process of co-designing the employee experience refers to involving employees in the design process and considering the perspectives, opinions, and needs of the employees. By involving employees in the design process, organisations can create a more authentic and effective employee experience that meets the needs of employees and contributes to overall business success (Plaskoff, 2017). According to Plaskoff (2017), involving employees in the design process can lead to increased employee engagement, as well as a more positive employee experience overall.

## 2.4 Important Aspects of Working Life

Apart from the research presented above, several studies are highlighting what aspects of working life that are considered as important among employees to improve employee engagement and decrease turnover. For example, Abdulaziz, Bashir, and Alfalih (2022) explore the impact of work-life balance and work overload on the organisational commitment of teachers. The authors suggest that improving work-life balance and reducing work overload may increase teachers' organisational commitment, which could lead to better job



performance. Additionally, the authors highlight the importance of job engagement and perceived organisational support in mitigating the negative effects of work-life balance on teacher's organisational commitment.

Similarly, Oosthuizen, Coetzee, and Munro (2019), suggest that organisations can improve job satisfaction and retention among employees by promoting work-life balance and implementing policies and practices that support employee well-being. Also, Oosthuizen, Coetzee, and Munro (2019) found that age, gender, and education level did not significantly influence the relationship between work-life balance, job satisfaction, and turnover intention. Badri (2019) conducted a similar study and achieved similar results.

Moreover, Schneider et al. (2018) propose that workforce engagement is influenced by individual, social, and organisational factors, such as job characteristics, leadership, social support, and organisational culture. The authors further suggest that organisations can improve workforce engagement by creating a positive work environment, promoting employee well-being, and fostering a sense of meaningful work. Additionally, the authors highlight the importance of measuring and tracking workforce engagement as a way to improve organisational performance.

McCarthy et al. (2013), explored the impact of supervisory support and perceived organisational support on work-life balance outcomes among employees. The results of the study indicate that both supervisory support and perceived organisational support are positively related to work-life balance outcomes, including job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and intention to remain with the organisation. Additionally, McCarthy et al. (2013) describe that supervisory support has a stronger influence on work-life balance outcomes than perceived organisational support. Thus, McCarthy et al. (2013) suggest that organisations can improve work-life balance outcomes by providing training and resources to supervisors to help them better support their employees. In short, the authors highlight the importance of supportive supervisors and organisations in promoting work-life balance and positive employee outcomes.

### **3. Theoretical Considerations**

For this study, the concept of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad is applied as the theoretical framework. The Spatial Triad has not yet been applied to the phenomenon of the employee experience in academia. As highlighted in Chapter 2, previous research emphasises that there are several aspects of an experience within both the marketing and sales domain, as well as within HRM. Thus, the theory by Lefebvre (1991) appears suitable, as it allows for exploring an experience from a holistic perspective, highlighting both the mental and physical aspects of an experience. Additionally, as mentioned in the introductory chapter of this study, applying the theory of the Spatial Triad allows for exploring a different way of understanding the employee experience.

This chapter will start by outlining the background and principles of the theoretical framework of the Spatial Triad, followed by a theoretical discussion in terms of previous applications of the theories and its relevance in this study. Lastly, limitations of the theoretical framework will be presented.

#### **3.1 Lefebvre's Spatial Triad**

The theoretical concept by Lefebvre has its standpoint in the notion of the production of space, which, according to Lefebvre (1991) is crucial to consider as a way of understanding how we experience and understand the social world. Lefebvre (1991) implies that different kinds of spaces can be explored separately - the perceived-, the conceived-, and the lived space. However, to understand the production of space, and thus the social world, Lefebvre (1991) implies that all these spaces should be considered.

Lefebvre (1991) implies that the production of space is fundamental to all lived experiences. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, it suggests that an experience is constructed by an individual's subjective understanding of and interaction with a particular place, space, or environment. An experience is not just a matter of perception but is shaped by the individual's history, culture, and social context, as well as the physical characteristics of the environment. Experiences are dynamic and constantly evolving, and they play a crucial role in shaping our perceptions of the world and our sense of place (Lefebvre, 1991).

### **3.1.1 The Perceived Space**

The Spatial Triad refers to the three dimensions of space that are identified as being central to understanding how space is produced and experienced in society. The first dimension is called the perceived space, also known as spatial practices, and comprises sensory experiences as well as spatial and symbolic characteristics. Additionally, the dimensions of perceived space incorporate cultural and social norms, personal values, and beliefs, which within this dimension imply how individuals perceive and interact with the physical and social environments around them, and how it may influence their perception of the physical environment. In conjunction with the other two elements of the Spatial Triad, the level of competence and cohesion for everyday functions of society are ensured (Watkins, 2005).

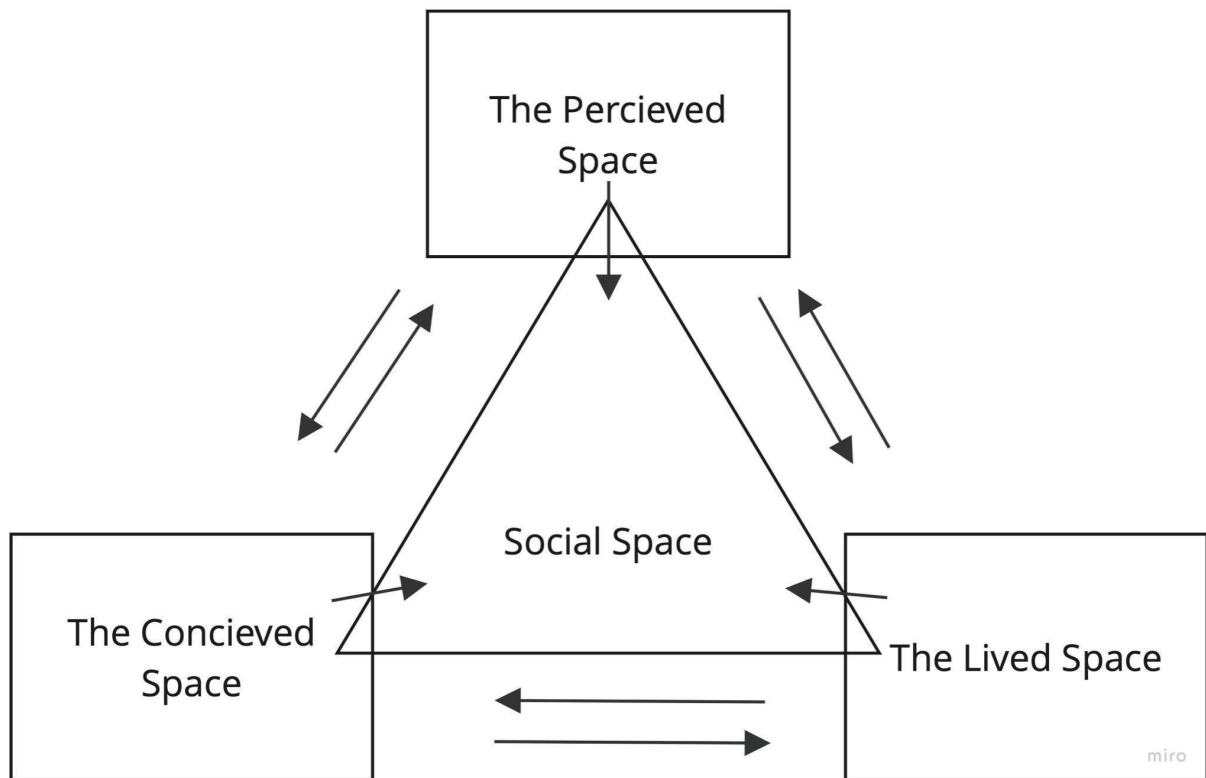
### **3.1.2 The Conceived Space**

The conceived space, also referred to as the representations of space, involves aspects of symbols, abstract representations and codifications (Watkins, 2005). In other words, the dimension of the conceived space includes the efforts of creating the representation of space, through for example maps, blueprints, ideologies and different power structures.

### **3.1.3 The Lived Space**

The dimension of lived space is characterised by the spaces of lived experiences (Watkins, 2005). The aspects of the lived space are related to the feelings, memories and associations that people have in relation to different experiences and spaces. In other words, the lived space involves the meaning and emotions that individuals attach to different spaces and experiences.

Lefebvre argued that these three dimensions of space are interconnected and influence one another, and that understanding their interrelationships is key to understanding how the social space is produced and experienced, see Figure 1 (Watkins, 2005).



*Figure 1 - My Understanding of The Production of Space*

## 3.2 Theoretical Discussion

### 3.2.1 Previous Applications

The theoretical concept by Lefebvre has been applied to a wide range of contexts to explore and understand the interplay of the three dimensions in a particular situation or concept, such as a theatre play (Watkins, 2005), the gig economy and its effects on the organisation of work (Newlands, 2021), and to analyse organisations of various kinds (Watkins, 2006; Beyes & Steyaert, 2012).

Watkins (2006) outlines the opportunities related to applying the theory of the Spatial Triad in studying and managing organisations. The author highlights the neglect of social norms and physical experiences in organisational performance and the potential consequences for managers making ineffective decisions. This is a result of exploring and analysing the everyday aspects of organisational performance and the domination of abstract

representations, through the lens of the Spatial Triad (Watkins, 2006). The author implies that organisations primarily focus on the perceived and conceived dimensions, neglecting the lived experiences of the employees.

Moreover, Beyes and Steyaert (2012), explore the interconnection between space and critical organisational theory, and implies an alternative interpretation of the Spatial Triad, and introduce a new concept the authors refer to as “spacing”. The authors suggest that “spacing” focuses on the material, embodied, emotional, and minor aspects of organisational space. Further, Beyes and Steyaert (2012) highlight that there are several aspects, major and minor, that are important to consider to understand everyday experiences.

Drawing on the aforementioned, Newlands (2021) explores a more recent mode of work through the lens of the Spatial Triad, analysing the use of algorithmic surveillance in the gig economy and its effects on the organisation of work. Newlands (2021) mainly applies Lefebvre's concept of conceived space to analyse how algorithmic surveillance shapes the mental and symbolic representations of work, and its impact on the material, embodied, and affective dimensions of work. The author argues that algorithmic surveillance has significant implications for the working conditions and experiences of gig workers, as well as the broader implications for the gig economy and the wider economy.

### **3.2.2 Relevance**

The theoretical framework by Lefebvre has not yet been applied to the phenomenon of the employee experience in a holistic fashion. For instance, Newlands (2021) applies only the dimension of conceived space to analyse how algorithmic surveillance shapes the mental and symbolic representations of work. As highlighted in Chapter 2, previous research emphasises that there are several aspects of an experience. Thus, the theory by Lefebvre appears suitable, as it allows for exploring the employee experience from a holistic perspective, which aligns with the purpose of this study.

As previously mentioned, Batat (2022), suggests a framework for the employee experience in which organisations should work with the employee experience based on three foundational pillars - personal entities, social entities, and cultural entities. Within these pillars, elements of

the employee experience are highlighted such as relationships, physical and psychosocial aspects of the work environment, work-life balance, job satisfaction, career development opportunities, organisational culture, norms, and values, among other aspects. Moreover, Plaskoff (2017) emphasises the importance of co-designing the employee experience by involving employees in the design process and considering their perspectives, opinions, and needs. By involving employees in the design process, organisations can create a more authentic and effective employee experience that meets the needs of employees and contributes to overall business success (Plaskoff, 2017).

Drawing on the findings by Batat (2022) and Plaskoff (2017), as well as the previous use of the theory presented in section 3.2.1, the table below presents a mapping of the interpreted areas within the employee experience to explore through the dimensions of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad:

<b>Perceived Space:</b>	<b>Conceived Space:</b>	<b>Lived Space:</b>
<i>Physical work environment, office layout, design, and equipment</i>	<i>Processes and systems</i>	<i>Job satisfaction</i>
<i>Community and surroundings of the office</i>	<i>Hierarchy and decision-making</i>	<i>Mental and emotional health</i>
	<i>Organisational culture, values and norms, and identity</i>	<i>Personal and professional development</i>
		<i>Independence</i>

*Table 1 - Areas to Explore of the Employee Experience*

As previously mentioned, the three dimensions of social space according to the Spatial Triad are the perceived space, the conceived space, and the lived space (Lefebvre, 1991). As described by Watkins (2005), the perceived space comprises sensory experiences, cultural and social norms, personal values and beliefs, as well as spatial and symbolic characteristics. Drawing on the aforementioned, in terms of exploring the employee experience in an organisation the perceived space can, for example, be used to analyse the physical work environment of an organisation, such as the office layout, the design of the workplace, and the

work equipment. Also, other aspects related to the physical work environment, such as the geographical location.

The conceived space involves aspects of symbols, abstract representations, and codifications (Lefebvre, 1991). In other words, the dimension of the conceived space includes the efforts of creating the representation of space, through for example maps, blueprints, ideologies, and different power structures. In terms of exploring the employee experience in an organisation, the conceived space can, for example, be used to analyse the employees' perception of the processes, systems, and structures within the organisation and how those affect their working life and experience of working in an organisation. Additionally, the conceived space can be used to explore the employee's experience of the organisation's culture and values, as well as to what extent the employees identify themselves with these.

The dimension of lived space is characterised by the spaces of lived experiences (Watkins, 2005). The aspects of the lived space are related to the feelings, memories, and associations that people have concerning different experiences and spaces. In other words, the lived space involves the meaning and emotions that individuals attach to different spaces and experiences. In terms of exploring the employee experience in an organisation, the lived space can help in analysing elements such as job satisfaction, mental and emotional health, development, and independence in the work situation.

### 3.3 Criticism and Limitations of the Theoretical Framework

Although the theory of the Spatial Triad has not yet been applied to the phenomenon of the employee experience, the theory comes with certain limitations. Pierce and Martin (2015) present a nuanced and multifaceted criticism of the spatial triad and the ideas of the production of space. Although the authors emphasise the positives of the theory, the authors also propose areas for further improvement and development.

For example, the authors propose that one main area of critique concerns Lefebvre's state-centred approach to understanding the production of space. That is, by focusing too heavily on the role of the state in shaping space, Lefebvre neglects how private interests can also contribute to spatial production. Pierce and Martin (2015) suggest that a more

comprehensive understanding of spatial production would take into account the complex interplay between state and non-state actors.

Moreover, Pierce and Martin (2015) highlight issues related to the theory being urban-centric. The authors argue that the theoretical considerations of Lefebvre lack in terms of not taking into account the specific cultural, economic, and political factors that shape space in different contexts.

The authors also imply that the theoretical considerations in terms of the production of space neglect agency. That is, while Lefebvre's emphasis on the structural aspects of spatial production is valuable, the authors argue that it risks obscuring the role of marginalised groups in shaping space. Pierce and Martin (2015) suggest that a more nuanced approach would acknowledge the agency of different groups in shaping, resisting, and negotiating dominant spatial structures.

Finally, Pierce and Martin (2015) argue that Lefebvre's theories would benefit from a more thorough engagement with the question of power. While the theoretical ideas are useful for highlighting how social relations shape space, they do not fully account for how power relations intersect with spatial production. The authors suggest that a more thorough analysis of power relations and how they shape the production of space would enrich our understanding of Lefebvre's ideas. Although the criticism poses limitations to this study, applying the theory by Lefebvre allows for exploring the employee experience from a holistic perspective, and in a novel fashion, which aligns with the purpose of this study.



## 4. Method

In this chapter, the methodological considerations of the study are presented. The chapter starts by outlining the research approach, followed by the research design including the study design, interview design, and sampling strategy. Further, the chapter explains the data collection method and the analytical strategy, followed by the validity and reliability of the study as well as ethical considerations.

### 4.1 Research Approach

This study undertakes a qualitative approach as the methodology allows for a detailed understanding from several perspectives on the specific phenomenon - the employee experience (Denzin, Norman & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 2009).

As previously mentioned, the purpose of this study is to obtain a holistic understanding of the employee experience by applying Lefebvre's Spatial Triad as an analytical tool, as well as to contextually visualise the concept of the employee experience and its characteristics. To achieve this, the relevant data regards the opinions, perceptions, and understandings of the employees in terms of their employee experience. Drawing on the aforementioned, important actors in the research process are the employees in the organisation. As previously mentioned, the research questions are phrased as follows;

**Research Question 1:** What factors are most prominent in characterising the employee experience in an organisation?

**Research Question 2:** How do the factors interplay and impact each other?

To enhance the ability to answer the research questions, the methodological approach of this study follows the logic presented by Lagde et al. (2012), in terms of the main steps to undertake in qualitative research.

According to Lagde et al. (2012), the logic of qualitative research should start by (1) developing general research questions and objectives that aim to guide the study. Moreover, the second (2) step involves identifying relevant participants (sample) for the study as well as

a relevant context. The third (3) step involves collecting relevant data, through, for example, semi-structured interviews. Further, the fourth (4) step involves analysing the data collected, which, for example, can be conducted through thematic analysis to find common themes of interrelationships. The fifth (5) step involves evaluating the data collected with the theoretical approach and previous research. In this step, the research questions are reassessed and reevaluated. As a result, further data collection might be necessary. Lastly, (6) the findings and conclusions of the study are presented. Moreover, Lagde et al. (2012) highlight the importance of addressing ethical considerations, as well as discussing the validity and reliability of the study.

## 4.2 Research Design

### 4.2.1 Study Design

The design of this study is both descriptive and a case study. A case study allows for studying a research problem in depth and is also suitable for applying theories or models to a phenomenon that has not previously been applied to a large extent (Anastas, 1999), which makes the descriptive case study design relevant for this study. A descriptive study design allows for help in answering questions concerning who, what, when, where, and how associated with a particular research problem, which aligns with the purpose of this study (Anastas, 1999). The descriptive research design is also useful in terms of suggesting implications and recommendations, which relate to the purpose of this study.

Moreover, the research strategy of this study includes elements of both inductive reasoning as well as abductive reasoning. According to Mantere and Ketokivi (2013), inductive reasoning implies that the research starts by collecting data or empirical observations to use for developing an explanation. The inductive approach suggests that the researcher moves from specific observations to more general conclusions, often through a process of categorising the data to identify patterns and themes.

The abductive approach implies that the researcher collects data or empirical observations that do not yet fit with existing theories or explanations, and uses these to develop tentative explanations. The researcher moves back and forth between observations and theory, refining

or revising the hypothesis as necessary based on additional data or observations (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). Although this study does not propose any hypotheses, the abductive reasoning appears applicable as the phenomenon of the employee experience is being studied through the lens of the Lefebvre Spatial Triad, a theoretical application that has not yet been conducted in previous research. Further, Mantere and Ketokivi (2013) highlight that the abductive approach is becoming increasingly important in fields where complex phenomena are being studied, such as organisational studies.

After data collection, the research questions were refined and revised, from being rather general to being more specific, as it was found more suitable for matching with the empirical observations. Additionally, the results from the data collection generated a need for adding section 2.4., as the results yielded a further dimension for discussion.

#### **4.2.2 Interview Design**

As previously mentioned, a common data collection method for qualitative research is through conducting semi-structured interviews (Lagde et al., 2012), a method which also is used in this study. Designing semi-structured interviews is beneficial as it, for example, allows for capturing interesting details in the interview (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Moreover, McIntosh and Morse (2015) highlight further beneficial elements of conducting semi-structured interviews, such as the flexibility stemming from the spontaneous discussions, and thus exploring certain topics of the interview in greater depth.

To address the research questions, an interview guide was created based on the dimensions of Lefebvre Spatial Triad, and the interpretations presented in Table 1. The full interview guide can be found in Appendix A. Moreover, the interview guide was created considering the logic presented by Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) in which certain types of questions are presented as suggestions for constructing an interview guide. The authors explain that there are certain types of questions, or elements, that should be included in an interview guide for semi-structured interviews. Firstly, the interviewer should introduce the interviewee to the topic to establish a togetherness between the interviewer and interviewee. Secondly, follow-up questions should be prepared and included to encourage the interviewee to elaborate on their responses and provide more details. Thirdly, probing questions should be included, which

allows for exploring a particular topic or issue in greater depth. Fourthly, specifying questions should be included. Fifthly, direct questions should be included. Sixthly, indirect questions should be included to explore the interviewee's experiences or perspectives within a particular social or cultural context. Seventhly, structuring questions should be included to explain that the interview will now shift towards another focus. Further, silence should be allowed in terms of, for example, pauses, to make room for the interviewee to reflect and perhaps come up with further responses to a question. Lastly, interpreting questions should be included, which implies that the interviewer asks questions starting with “Do you mean that... when you say that... ?”.

Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) imply that by using a combination of these question types, the interviewer can gather rich and detailed data that is relevant to the research questions. It is important to note, however, that the interviewer should also be flexible and responsive to the interviewee's responses, and be willing to deviate from the interview guide when necessary to explore unexpected topics or issues.

The interview guide for this study was tested by conducting two pilot interviews with employees of the organisation, who were guaranteed the same confidentiality as any other participant in this study. The participants in the pilot interviews were informed about the fact that they participated in a pilot interview, and were asked to provide feedback and input after the interview was finished. The pilot interview was also an opportunity for me to assess the structure of the interview guide and the nature of the interview questions.

The participants in the pilot interview provided positive feedback in general. One of the participants highlighted that “... it was nice to reflect upon my experience.”, while the other participants emphasised that “... I believe people will enjoy participating in this study”. Also, the feedback provided for the interview guide in this study regarded that I should ask more follow-up questions and more specifying questions, to make the interviewee feel more comfortable. The results from the pilot interviews are not presented in this study.

Furthermore, the participants had worked in the organisation for different periods, one participant for 5 years, and the other participant for 1 year. I realised the responses of the

participants varied in terms of how they reflected upon their experiences, which made me add the questions about how long the participant has worked for the organisation to the interview guide. As previously mentioned, the interview guide was created based on the interpretations of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad presented in Table 1. To address the elements within each dimension, the interview guide entailed components of the categories according to Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) presented above, and the aspects were considered to the extent possible during the interviews. Additionally, a question about whether participants spend the majority of their working time at home or the office was included to gain a better understanding of their working situation and how that may impact their employee experience.

#### **4.2.3 Sampling Strategy**

The sample was concentrated on white-collar workers, particularly the occupational group engineers within the Swedish organisation. As previously mentioned, the organisation consists of both white- and blue-collar workers, as well as various occupational groups. The reason for selecting engineers as the sample for this study is due to engineers being the major occupational group within the organisation, as well as the differences in the job characteristics of blue- and white-collar workers.

The sampling strategy of this study is purposive, as the individuals participating in the study adhere to certain criteria and are strategically selected to be relevant to the research question and purpose of the study (Palinkas et al., 2015). According to Palys (2008), purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that involves selecting participants for a research study based on specific characteristics or criteria that are relevant to the research question or topic. In purposive sampling, the researcher identifies and selects participants who are likely to have information or experiences that are important for the research study. For this study homogenous sampling was conducted, which involves selecting participants who share similar characteristics or experiences, to explore a particular phenomenon in depth (Palys, 2008).

The selection process for this study was made available through access to master data systems within the organisation. Consequently, lists were able to be generated with information on employees' occupational groups and demographics. As a result, relevant participants adhering

to the occupational group, engineers, could be identified and contacted. Further, the goal was to contact approximately 20 individuals asking if they were interested and willing in participating in an interview for this project. The number of participants contacted from each site was based on a percentage amount of the total employees at each site. For example, as the production plant is the largest site in Sweden, more individuals from that site were contacted. Additionally, the purposive sampling process had a diversity perspective.

### 4.3 Data Collection Method

The design of this study involves data collection from semi-structured interviews. 20 individuals were asked to participate in the study, and 14 individuals accepted to participate. Primary data was, thus, collected through 14 semi-structured interviews with employees from the Swedish part of the case organisation. The majority of the participants were men.

As previously mentioned, the interview guide was designed based on the dimensions of the Spatial Triad, as well as the interpretations presented in Table 1. The three dimensions of the spatial triad were explored almost to an equal extent through the interviews.

The interviews were conducted digitally within the organisation, by using the digital tools and equipment of the organisation, through the software MS Teams. Participants were first contacted through email with the question regarding whether they would like to participate or not, see Appendix B. If participants accepted the proposal, they were invited with additional information about the time for the interview, as well as information about the project and consent form, see Appendix C.

All participants received the same information before and during the interview, as described in the appendices. 30 minutes were scheduled for each interview. If needed, I asked the participant for permission to prolong the interview. The aforementioned resulted in some interviews being longer than others, and thus, some questions were not being asked to participants if time ran out. Further, due to the nature of semi-structured interviews as a data collection method, questions were sometimes asked differently or in different order depending on the conversation. This also implied that questions sometimes were excluded by mistake in some interviews. The interviews were conducted in either Swedish or English.

All participants were guaranteed confidentiality and transparency and received the right to withdraw from the participation at any time. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Recordings were handled as described in Appendix C.

Participants were asked what educational background they have, as well as for how many years they have worked within the organisation. Among the participants, eleven participants had a university degree, either a bachelor's or a master, in engineering. Two participants had a university degree in another field than engineering, and one participant had a degree in engineering from high school. Further, five participants had worked within the company for one to three years, seven participants had worked within the company for four to five years, and two participants had worked within the company for more than 20 years. As mentioned previously, the purposive sampling had a diversity perspective mainly in terms of ethnic background and gender.

All participants were allowed to make additions to the interview if they liked to. If they did not have anything to say directly, they were also informed about the opportunity to contact me after the interview to make additions to the interview. Three participants took the opportunity to make additions to the interview during the interview session. Participants 10, 2, and 12 made additions to their interviews when they were asked whether they would like to or not. Participant 3 asked for permission to contact me if they had anything to add.

#### 4.4 Analytical Strategy

As previously mentioned, the research strategy of this study includes elements of both inductive reasoning and abductive reasoning. The inductive analytical approach seeks to explore and identify themes, patterns, or interrelationships (Denzin, Norman, & Lincoln, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Merriam, 2009), and the abductive analytical strategy implies that the researcher collects data or empirical observations that do not yet fit with existing theories or explanations, and uses these to develop tentative explanations. The researcher moves back and forth between observations and theory, refining or revising the hypothesis as necessary based on additional data or observations (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013).

The analytical approaches presented above share similarities in terms of the purpose to identify themes, patterns, or interrelationships. For this study, the analytical strategy was thematic. The thematic analysis involves, as indicated by its name, a process of looking for and identifying themes through certain criteria. According to Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019), thematic analysis lacks clearly outlined processes. However, the flexibility of the analytic strategy allows for analysing a variety of qualitative data.

Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) explain that the overall criteria for defining a theme can be summarised as follows; First, a theme is a category that is based on and founded in the data collected by the researcher. Secondly, the theme is a category that relates to the research purpose of the study. Thirdly, a theme is a category that is identified and based on codes in transcripts used in the study. Lastly, a theme is a category that provides the researcher with an understanding of the data collected, and that can be used for making a theoretical contribution to the research field.

The analytical approach of thematic analysis suits the aim of this study, as it serves to build further the concept of the employee experience from a new contextual perspective, as well as from a different theoretical perspective.

The data from the interviews in this study has been subject to thematic analysis to find common themes, patterns, and interrelationships. After each interview, brief reflections and thoughts were noted to support the thematic analysis. After completing all 14 interviews, the interviews were transcribed to be used as a foundation for analysis. As the interviews were conducted in either Swedish or English, the transcripts were written in the language used during the interview. Thus, some quotes in the following sections have been translated into English. Quotes from the interviews have been slightly edited for readability.

The transcripts were later used as a foundation and material for identifying and labelling key concepts, categories, and relationships in the data. Each interview transcript was analysed separately, to allow for particular reflection. Thenceforth, each answer for each interview question was systematically analysed to find common themes in terms of, for example, repetitions or certain approaches. The themes are presented ensuingly throughout Chapter 5,



in the section to which they adhere to. The results and themes have been structured according to the dimensions of the Spatial Triad, the elements presented in Table 1, and the interview questions.

#### 4.5 Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of a qualitative study are rather limited compared to quantitative research. That is much due to the nature of qualitative research, and the fact that qualitative research seldom involves numeric measurements. Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) suggest that qualitative studies should be evaluated according to other criteria than quantitative studies, which often are evaluated based on internal and external validity and reliability. The four criteria proposed by Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) are; (1) credibility, (2), transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) conformability.

According to Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019), credibility is concerned with the internal validity of qualitative research. It refers to the extent to which the research is accurate, reliable, and trustworthy. This could be assessed through various techniques, such as member checking, triangulation, and peer debriefing. In terms of this aspect, there are limitations to the study as I am the sole researcher. However, the study has been subject to feedback from colleagues within the organisation, colleagues at the university, as well as the supervisor at the university.

The second criterion - transferability - is related to the external validity of qualitative research. It refers to the extent to which the research findings can be generalised to other settings or populations. That is, researchers must provide rich and detailed descriptions of the research context and methods, as well as the characteristics of the participants, which allows the readers to assess the extent to which the findings are relevant to their contexts (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the purpose of this study is to gain a holistic understanding of the employee experience and its characteristics in an organisation through the theoretical lens of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad, and how to make use of those insights as an HR practitioner. Although the study is being conducted in a particular context, the readers are provided with a nuanced image of the organisation, context, and methodology, which allows the reader to consider how and get inspired on how to apply the theoretical and

methodological approach, as well as the implications of this study, to another context of the situation.

To assess the extent to which the findings of the study are consistent and stable over time, and across different researchers, dependability should be considered. That is, researchers must document their research process in detail, including any changes or modifications made during the study (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). For this study, any changes or amendments have been documented in section 4.2.1.

Lastly, Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) suggest that the conformability criteria should be considered. The conformability criteria are related to the objectivity of qualitative research and refer to the extent to which the research findings are influenced by the researcher's biases, values, or perspectives. Thus, the researcher should engage in reflecting on how the researchers' biases, values, or perspectives may have influenced the research findings during the research process. Furthermore, purposive sampling is often used in qualitative research studies, where the goal is to explore a particular topic or phenomenon in depth. It allows researchers to select participants who are likely to have relevant information or experiences and to gather rich and detailed data that is well-suited to answering the research questions. However, because purposive sampling is not based on random selection, it may be subject to bias and may not be generalisable to the broader population (Palys, 2008).

## 4.6 Ethical Considerations

According to Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019), there are various aspects to consider in terms of ethics within qualitative research. For example, participants in the study should be provided an informed consent. Informed consent is an ethical principle that requires researchers to obtain voluntary and informed consent from research participants before collecting data. For this study, the participants have been provided with the information and document for signature in Appendix C. The document involves information about the purpose and nature of the research, the methods and procedures involved, and any risks or benefits. Participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time, and all participants signed the consent form.

Further, the consent form informed the participant about confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were ensured that any personal or identifying information is kept confidential and that participants' identities are not revealed in any published or disseminated findings. The aforementioned aligns with the ethical considerations suggested by Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019). This aspect has been further addressed in the study by not referring to participants as “he” or “she”, instead the pronoun used in this study when referring to participants is “they”. Moreover, no names nor job titles are used in this study. Instead, participants are referred to by number, for example, “participant 1”, and no other occupational appellations are used than “engineers”.

All participants in the study have been treated with the highest respect and dignity, involving sensitivity to the cultural, social, and psychological needs of the participants, and ensuring that they are not exploited or harmed in any way. The aforementioned is a suggested ethical measure according to Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019).

Further, Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) suggest that participants should be informed about where they can find the results of the study. This type of information was provided to participants through the consent form.

Further, ethical concerns may arise as I work for the organisation. According to Corbin, Dwyer & Buckle (2009), when the researcher possesses an “insider role” it is necessary to consider that the researcher might become biased. This is also highlighted by Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019), implying that the researcher should engage in reflexivity to critically examine and reflect upon their values, biases, and assumptions throughout the research process. This involves acknowledging the potential impact of the researcher's own identity, experiences, and positionality on the research process and findings. I acknowledge that the aforementioned may apply to this study as I am employed by the case organisation. However, during this study, I experienced that I was not influenced by the aforementioned factors due to the nature of the conduct of the study. The interviews, which are the source of the empiricism, have been conducted with colleagues that I either have not met or been in contact with before or colleagues with whom I do not work together regularly. Additionally, the interview guide

was created with no underlying force by the company. Albeit, I acknowledge that I may be unconsciously biased.

## 5. Results

In this chapter, the findings and analysis of the study are presented. The chapter includes three sections structured according to the dimensions of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad. Each section presents the findings related to the interview questions connected to the specific dimension, with the themes and patterns identified, followed by a summary of the key findings of each dimension. Additionally, quotes and anecdotes from the interviews are included where suitable. Lastly, answers to the research questions are presented.

The amount of participants contacted from each site was based on a percentage amount of the total employees at each site. For example, as the production plant is the largest site in Sweden, more individuals from that site were contacted. Of those participants who accepted to participate, the amount from each site is presented below;

**Production plant:** 6 participants

**Tech-site 1:** 4 participants

**Tech-site 2:** 2 participants

**Tech-site 3:** 2 participants

### 5.1 Perceived Space

As previously mentioned, the interviews were structured according to the three dimensions of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad - perceived-, conceived-, and lived space. The first dimension explored during the interviews was the perceived space. The questions for this dimension regarded the physical work environment, the community around the office building, and lastly, the remote working situation.

#### 5.1.1 Physical Work Environment and Challenges or Opportunities

The first interview question concerned how participants "...perceive the physical work environment, including the layout, furnishings, and equipment?". For this question, the repetitions that occurred during the interviews regarded the equipment, such as the ergonomic equipment and IT-related devices. Also, repetitions regarding the open plan office, noise, and other moments of disturbance occurred frequently in the interviews. The follow-up question

regarded whether participants “...experience any challenges or difficulties in their physical work environment?”, and if participants have “...addressed these challenges and how?”. For this question challenges related to the open plan office, noise, and other moments of disturbance occurred frequently.

13 participants elaborated on the equipment, and all of those had a positive experience both in terms of the equipment itself, and the support provided if they needed to extend their equipment. For instance, participant 3 shared their experience in terms of support:

“When it comes to equipment, I believe the responsible manager is doing a very good job being forward-looking with what type of equipment we need for the products that we are developing and will develop in the future. So we never really have to suffer any lack of technical equipment to do our job.” (Participant 3).

The office layout was discussed in eleven interviews. All participants but two were situated in an open plan office or a room with two or three other employees. The participants who were in an open plan office explained that there are both pros and cons to such a setup. Several participants highlighted that there were mainly social aspects that constitute the positive aspects of an open plan office. For example, participant 12 emphasises that the open and collaborative work environment encourages easy communication with colleagues and managers, allows for spontaneous discussions and brainstorming sessions, and doubts and clarifications can be resolved quickly. On the other hand, the participant highlights that challenges arise as it might be difficult to find privacy for urgent calls or discussions, even though there are conference rooms and quiet rooms available, these are sometimes occupied which requires rescheduling of meetings. On a similar note, participant 9 describes the following:

“The disadvantages are that you often get disturbed. The advantage is that you get a greater community with your colleagues and more easily pick up what is happening.” (Participant 9).

Drawing on the aforementioned, the participants highlight both the challenges and opportunities with the open plan office. Further, several participants explained that there are

possibilities to use a conference room or a quiet room for calls or discussions, although challenges arise as these might not be accessible constantly.

When participants were asked whether they had addressed the challenges they had experienced and how seven participants indicated that they had in one way or another. For instance, Participant 1 explained they had difficulties concentrating in the open plan office, getting easily disturbed. The participant raised their issue to their manager, and after a while, the participant was able to get a closed office of their own. As commented by the participant; “I didn't have to run away and work from home to be able to sit in peace.”. Participant 4 described a similar issue, and indicated that the issue got solved after a while and the participant was reallocated to an office space with fewer people - “I almost have my own room”.

Participant 11 described that they experience difficulties concentrating as many people are passing by the desk in the open plan office. The participant has addressed the challenge and explains that:

“We installed privacy screens at my desk. It's not the absolute best solution, but it's a fine solution. Considering where I'm sitting and how it looks, there aren't that many possibilities to do it another way unfortunately.” (Participant 11).

As indicated by the abovementioned experiences, there are many similarities in terms of the perceptions of the physical work environment. Although, slight differences in the responses can be identified depending on the place of work and the nature of the job. For example, some of the participants located at the production plant explained that there have been some challenges with the air conditioning. Also, a few participants highlighted that there can sometimes be challenges with the space, although they experience they are heard most of the time when they address the issue. For example, Participant 10 explains that: “Regarding the lack of space, we have actually received a table that we can take with us and use as a mobile desk.”.

For the participants placed at tech-site 1, a negative approach towards the premises was expressed as they are not so “trendy” and modern. Participant 2 highlighted that:

“Now when people are coming back to work, and we have these boring premises, it is not very inspiring. It's the same as when you bring someone in a recruitment process for an interview, you bring someone into a backyard, as we currently do. Things like that.... I think that they are not particularly nice, our premises.” (Participant 2).

The two participants from tech-site 3, on the other hand, seemed more content with their premises as they had recently undergone a renovation. The participants from that site were positive towards their premises and physical work environment.

Moreover, participants were asked where they spend the majority of their working time - working remotely or in the office. Eleven out of 14 participants explained that they spend most of their time at the office. Some participants explained they spend most of their working time at the office due to the nature of their work, while others explained that they felt better working at the office compared to home. At tech-site 2, however, the participants answered the opposite. Participant 5 explained that:

“I believe I would have been in the office if I had several colleagues that I work with here. But because I work very closely with colleagues from the other sites in Sweden, and also abroad. So I need to be on Teams a lot anyway ...” (Participant 5).

“...If I would have had many colleagues here that I work with, I would be here more often to meet them and spend time with them. Since we are very scattered in my organisation, it doesn't feel that important to be in the office that often.” (Participant 5).

The two participants from tech-site 2 explained that there are not many people working there and that the majority of the employees located at that site usually work a lot from home.

Further, participants were asked a question related to whether there are any particular aspects of their physical work environment that they find extra meaningful or significant. The three main themes that occurred related to this question regarded social aspects, ergonomic aspects including equipment, as well as noise and disturbance.



In terms of social aspects, the participants highlighted that they appreciate an environment with opportunities to socialise and areas where colleagues can relax and have a nice chat. Participant 5 highlights that:

“For me, it's about social situations. It's fun to have something you can do together with colleagues, even if we don't work together. We used to have a ping-pong table that we could have fun with from time to time. Today, we don't really have the same opportunity to relax and socialise with people from time to time.” (Participant 5).

Further, participants from different parts of the organisation highlighted that they find it extra important to be able to work undisturbed.

### **5.1.2 The Community and Surroundings**

The last question related to the dimension of perceived space regarded how the participants experience the surroundings and the community where the office is located, and what impact the participants believe that the surroundings and the community have on their overall experience. For this question, the dedication varied among participants. Some participants seemed rather indifferent or pragmatic concerning this aspect, while others seemed more dedicated to the matter and reflected more thoroughly. Also, some participants had difficulties understanding the question, which made it necessary to exemplify.

The main themes that were identified with this question regard restaurants, the nature around the office, the parking possibilities, and the distance to the office from the city centres.

The responses varied slightly depending on the job location. For example, two of six participants located at the production plant highlighted that there is a lack of restaurants in the area. Also, participants from the production plant either lived in or close to the community where the production plant is located, or in the nearest large city. Participant 7 highlighted that they would never consider living in that area because it is such a small village, while other participants who live in the area felt content and emphasised the positives of living close to work.

Participants from all four job locations highlighted that there are a good amount of parking lots, apart from one tech-site 2 for which a participant highlighted that they have a garage to park in which is very expensive. Although the same participant highlighted that there are good commute connections to that job location both by car and by public transport.

As previously mentioned, the dedication to this question varied among participants. Some of the participants elaborated more thoroughly in their responses, and those who reflected upon the impact on their employee experience did not know or were indifferent to the impact.

### **5.1.3 Summary**

The factors appearing prominent within this dimension are related to the open plan office, the possibilities to concentrate in the office space, having good equipment, and the importance of having nice-looking premises.

Moreover, the social aspects of the physical work environment appear important among the participants. For example, it was highlighted that although the open plan office comes with challenges in terms of being able to concentrate, it allows for spontaneous discussions and possibilities to socialise with your colleagues. Additionally, participants mentioned that they value social areas where they can hang out with their colleagues.

Further, the extent to which participants are working from home seems to vary depending on the office location or the nature of the job. For example, participants from tech-site 2 highlighted that almost all employees at their office work the majority of their working time from home. The participants highlighted that they believe the social aspects are important, and would have been more frequently at the office if more employees spent their working time there.

The office location seemed as a less important factor in terms of characterising the employee experience. Participants seemed indifferent about the impact of the office location on their employee experience. However, participants from the production plant highlighted the distance to the office, either close or far, when reflecting upon the impact of the location.

## 5.2 Conceived Space

The second part of the interview concerned the dimension of conceived space. The questions constructed for this dimension regarded the employees' perception of the processes, systems, and structures within the organisation and how these affect their working life and employee experience. Also, questions related to the employee's experience of the organisational culture and values, as well as to what extent the employees identify themselves with these were included.

### 5.2.1 The Processes and Systems

For the first part of this dimension, participants were asked questions related to the organisation's processes and systems and how they believe these affect their daily work. Also, participants were asked to describe any instances where they felt that the systems and processes that exist hindered or facilitated their work.

For this area, some participants had difficulties in understanding the questions which made me exemplify, while still highlighting that they should consider the systems and processes they come across in their daily working life, and how they believe those impact their employee experience. Overall, participants had a lot to say in terms of these questions, and most participants elaborated quite extensively on the topic. The most common theme identified, which was highlighted and elaborated on by eight participants, concerns that there are a lot of processes and systems, causing both challenges and opportunities.

The variety of processes might sometimes cause confusion and questions regarding what process to follow. For example, one participant highlighted that internal processes are helpful when they are unsure of what to do, however, the processes were described as a bit scattered, and information related to the processes and systems was described as troublesome to find sometimes.

Nine participants highlighted some sort of frustration in regard to the processes or systems. For example, participant 10 described that;

“It can feel quite frustrating, I have experienced it as for every new thing I do, I have to learn a new system and sometimes it might not work so well.” (Participant 10).

Further the same participant highlighted that the systems are facilitating and helping in their task as well, mentioning that:

“Well, it's clear that the systems make things easier, that's why they exist. But it has been a bit of a "barrier to entry" so to speak. It is only when you are up and running that it works well, but that it requires some effort.” (Participant 10).

Moreover, three participants highlighted the need for being able to approach ad-hoc issues or problems in the organisation while we discussed the processes or systems. Participant 11 highlighted the importance of having documented processes and their helpfulness in their daily work but also notes the negative impact when processes are not being followed. The participant implies that individuals tend sometimes not to follow the processes as outlined, and the participant as themselves; “Why are we doing this if it is still approved in the end?”. The participant highlighted that such tendencies might lead to demotivation and a lack of commitment. Although, the participant is particular to mention that during their time within the organisation, they have noted a positive development in terms of processes and the implementation of a problem-solving methodology. The aforementioned were highlighted by several participants. Also, it was mentioned that it sometimes takes some time for the processes to adapt to the changing business environment, which makes them lag.

### **5.2.2 Hierarchy and Decision-making**

Moreover, participants were asked how they believe the organisation's hierarchy and decision-making processes affect their experiences in the workplace. The common themes that occurred for this aspect in the interviews regarded that participants experience that there is a flat organisation and short decision-making paths. Five participants highlighted explicitly that they perceive the organisation as flat, while more participants indicated a similar. The flat organisational structure allows for easy contact with other departments. For example, participant 12 highlighted that:

“I don't always need to book an appointment when it comes to certain issues, things can often be addressed right away. It's easy to approach colleagues. So, in that way I would say it is a flat organisation.” (Participant 12).

Further, eight participants highlighted that the decision-making processes are short. For example, participant 4 mentioned; “It is very easy to communicate with the project management to get something done. I don't feel that there is any major hierarchy.”

As indicated above, the decision-making processes and organisational structures were in general experienced as flat, impacting positively on employee engagement. Although, there were indications of differences in terms of the line organisation and the project organisations. For example, participant 2 described that the general feeling in terms of decision-making processes is experienced as pragmatic. Although the participant notes that the decision-making process can be challenging when it comes to resource management, especially in terms of the project organisations.

The aforementioned was also highlighted by two other participants, describing that resource management for projects can be a cumbersome process, and may impact the workload of the employees.

### **5.2.3 Organisational Culture and Identity**

For the last question within this dimension, participants were asked how they believe the organisation's culture, values, and norms affect their experiences in the workplace. Additionally, they were asked about to what extent they feel that these represent and align with their values and principles. Many participants expressed that they had difficulties understanding what I implied with “the organisation's culture, values, and norms”, sometimes I tried to assist in terms of expressing that they should consider “the first things popping up in their mind when considering the organisational culture at the company”. Although, for these responses, the common themes identified were development, improvement, inclusiveness, and there is a helpful and supportive atmosphere. Six participants mentioned they experience the organisational culture as helpful and supportive, and four participants highlighted that they believe it is inclusive. For example, participant 4 mentioned that;

“Well, for the ones I work with and the ones I have here... I think it's a very... prestigeless culture where everyone wants to help and try to help. I think that is good. As I experience it, you don't make a difference between any kind of person and people, you feel that everyone is treated equally with the same value.” (Participant 4).

Four participants highlighted that the company is seen as supportive of employees' efforts to contribute to the organisation's development and growth. For instance, participant 9 mentioned that;

“I feel that the goals and objectives of the company are permeated downwards and that we are encouraged to do better. We are encouraged to develop, and there is a lot of time spent on the employee. Then you feel you are willing to contribute.” (Participant 9).

Moreover, the organisation has a strategic framework for which the values and principles of the organisation are stated. The strategic framework was mentioned in only three interviews. The other participants did not relate much to the strategic framework. However, some pillars included in the strategic framework were mentioned by the participants anyway, such as improvement.

Lastly, in terms of the question regarding to what extent the participants feel that the values and principles of the organisation represent and align with their values and principles, the majority of the participants did not explicitly answer that question. However, for those six participants who did answer the question explicitly, they all mentioned that they agree with or believe the values and principles align with their personal values and principles.

#### **5.2.4 Summary**

For this dimension, participants were asked about the processes and systems within the organisation, the hierarchical structures and decision-making processes, as well as the organisational cultures, values, and how well they identify themselves with them. The factors appearing prominent within this dimension were related to frustration regarding the complexity and amount of the processes and systems. Further, the organisation was perceived as a flat and inclusive organisation, with inclusive and effective decision-making processes.

However, participants working in project organisations highlighted that decision-making in terms of resource management can be challenging.

In terms of organisational culture, the factors appearing prominent were that participants perceived the organisational culture as encouraging improvement, that there is a supportive atmosphere, and that participants appreciate and value their colleagues.

## 5.3 Lived Space

The last part of the interview was centred around the elements of the lived space. The questions for the dimension of lived space concerned elements such as job satisfaction, well-being, development, and independence in the working life situation.

### 5.3.1 Job Satisfaction

The first questions of this dimension regarded how participants would describe their overall job satisfaction, as well as a question regarding what aspects of their working life they would describe as more or less important. 12 out of 14 participants expressed that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their job.

The factors mentioned among employees concerning their job satisfaction as well as the aspects of their working life they would describe as important were colleagues, tasks and assignments, trust, and development. Nine of 14 participants highlighted that their colleagues are important to them in terms of their job satisfaction and aspects that they believe are important for enjoying their working situation. Further, seven out of 14 participants describe that they consider their tasks and assignments as important for their job satisfaction. In terms of trust, four participants highlight that they experience a high degree of trust among both managers and colleagues and that that is a reason for them to enjoy the work. The thematic analysis also indicates that development and development opportunities are mentioned as an aspect in terms of these questions. This is mentioned by five participants, however, two of the participants express that they lack development opportunities and wish for improvement within this area, while the other three participants express themselves positively regarding this aspect.

### **5.3.2 Mental and Emotional Health**

Another question for this dimension regards how participants experience their working situation affecting their mental and emotional health. For this question, six participants mentioned that they did not believe that their working situation impacted much on their mental and emotional health. However, among these six participants, several highlighted that they occasionally experience high levels of stress and workload. The thematic analysis further indicates that six out of 14 participants experience a high level of workload, which negatively impacts their mental and emotional health. Also, three participants highlighted that a reason for the high workload is due to a lack of resources within the team. Further, four out of 14 participants highlight that they experience their working situation as stressful and that this impacts negatively on their mental and emotional health.

### **5.3.3 Personal and Professional Development**

Within the dimension of the lived space, participants were asked how they experience that their work contributes to their personal and professional development. For this question, ten out of 14 participants indicated that they believe their work has contributed both to their professional and personal development. Furthermore, the thematic analysis indicated that seven participants describe that they have learned a lot from working at this company, mainly professionally, but also personally. For example, participant 5 describes that;

“Professionally, I believe I have developed very much. I have learned a lot and been involved in so many different parts and been given different responsibilities. As a result, I have worked with a variety of tasks and learned a lot. Personally, I believe I have developed as well. However, it is a bit more difficult to understand how. I believe I have become calmer, and a little more confident in how I express myself and how I deal with various problems in everyday life.” (Participant 5).

Moreover, five participants describe that they experience that there are good development opportunities within the company in terms of, for example, internal and external training. Also, in terms of teamwork. For instance, participant 3 describes that; “You always learn a lot



from each other. I experience that there always is room for suggesting improvements in different situations.”.

#### **5.3.4 Independence**

Within the dimension of lived space, participants were asked about how they feel about the level of independence and control they have in their work tasks. For this question, six participants mentioned they experience that they have a high degree of control in their work tasks. Further, four participants mentioned they experience that there is a high degree of “freedom under responsibility”. For example, participant 10 describes that;

“To a large extent, we work very independently in our group. Our manager is responsible for a larger group apart from us. It's almost like we're working on our own. And sometimes our group might say to our manager, ‘we'd like to do this,’ and then he says, ‘sure, go ahead.’ So in that sense, we have quite a high degree of independence. Almost a little too much independence in a way, because quite a lot of people come to us from other departments and groups and ask for help.” (Participant 10).

Moreover, the degree of independence seems to vary depending on the nature of the job. 2 participants describe that their level of independence is either low or varies, that is depending on their job description. For example, participant 7 described that; “In my job, you can merely never decide anything by yourself. I am dependent on the help from others all the time.”

#### **5.3.5 Expectations and Employee Experience as a Whole**

As concluding questions, participants were asked to what extent they feel that their general experience of working in the organisation was in line with the expectations they had before joining the company. Also, participants were asked to describe and summarise their employee experience as a whole. For the first question, two participants explained that they believe their experience aligned with their expectations. Three participants expressed that they believe their expectations were exceeded. Four participants mentioned that their expectations were not met when joining the company, and five participants were undecided.

For the participants describing that their expectations were exceeded, factors such as the organisational culture and work environment were mentioned, as well as the tasks and assignments. For example, participant 13 mentioned that “I was very surprised, in a positive way, about the work environment and the culture within the company. Especially about the view on women in Swedish organisations.”.

For the participants describing that their expectations were not met once joining the company, factors such as the tasks and role description were mentioned, as well as a sense of poor structure and an “immature” organisation. Participant 4 mentioned that;

“I believe the requirements were significantly higher than I expected. There were significantly higher requirements, and entry thresholds, particularly. It was difficult and very unstructured compared to my previous employers and tasks. Today, it is more structured.” (Participant 4).

Among the participants who were undecided in terms of whether their expectations were met or not, a few of them had been consultants at the company before being employed, indicating that it is difficult to distinguish the periods. Further, participant 9 described their ambiguity by explaining that;

“My expectations were both exceeded and not exceeded. I joined a much larger company compared to the one I worked at before, so I compared a lot with my previous company. When I started here, I did something completely different from what I had done before. So, I had certain expectations that were perhaps not so realistic. But if I'm being completely honest, I had good expectations for it and got slightly different results. But those results were just as good. It didn't turn out the way I imagined, but it turned out as well as I thought.” (Participant 9).

As a summarising question, participants were asked how they would describe their employee experience within the company as a whole. For those who were asked the question explicitly, which were nine participants, all participants answered that they were overall positive or very positive considering their employee experience. Further, when reflecting on their experience the positive aspects concerns are related to the colleagues, the collaboration among

colleagues, as well as the supportive atmosphere from both management and colleagues within the organisation. The negative aspects mentioned are related to workload and stress, as well as the way of working. For example, participant 2 mentioned; “Overall, I would recommend the company, but mainly due to the atmosphere among colleagues and the high-tech products, not for the way of working.”.

### **5.3.6 Summary**

Participants are highly satisfied with their job and refer to both positive and negative aspects in describing the most prominent factors impacting their job satisfaction. The positive factors that seemed most prominent in characterising the employee experience are the colleagues, the tasks, the trust, as well as the development opportunities. The negative factors that seemed most prominent in characterising the employee experience are the workload and stress. Moreover, participants experience that their work situation impacts both their professional and personal development, for example, in terms of learning from colleagues. Additionally, the degree of independence is high in general, although impacted by the nature of the job. Overall, participants were overall positive or very positive considering their employee experience. Further, when reflecting on their experience the positive aspects concerns are related to the colleagues, the collaboration among colleagues, as well as the supportive atmosphere from both management and colleagues within the organisation.

## **5.4 Research Questions**

The results of this study illustrate a nuanced and extensive image of the employee experience and its characteristics in this particular context. The data collection was guided by the dimensions of Lefebvre’s Spatial Triad and illustrates the employee experience based on the Spatial Triad, as well as how the theoretical model can be applied as a tool for analysing the employee experience in an organisation. In this section, the research questions of this study are answered, which are;

**Research Question 1:** What factors are most prominent in characterising the employee experience in an organisation?

**Research Question 2:** How do the factors interplay and impact each other?

**5.4.1 What factors are most prominent in characterising the employee experience in an organisation?**

As indicated by the results, several factors are prominent in characterising the employee experience. Table 2 presents a summary of the prominent factors within each dimension, the most prominent factors are bolded. However, within all three dimensions, the social aspects were highly prominent. Also, when participants were asked to summarise their employee experience as a whole within the organisation, aspects such as colleagues, collaboration, and the supportive atmosphere among colleagues and management were highlighted as positive and important aspects among the participants. The negative factors that seemed most prominent in characterising the employee experience are the workload and stress.

In conclusion, the factors that are most prominent in characterising the employee experience of the organisation are related to social aspects, a supportive atmosphere among colleagues and management, as well as stress and workload.

<b>Perceived Space:</b>	<b>Conceived Space:</b>	<b>Lived Space:</b>
<i>Open plan office (opportunities to socialise, challenges in terms of concentration/disturbance)</i>	<i>Frustration regarding complexity of processes and systems/way of working</i>	<i>High job satisfaction</i>
<i>Equipment</i>	<b><i>Flat and inclusive organisation</i></b>	<b><i>Colleagues</i></b>
<i>Premises</i>	<i>Effective decision-making</i>	<i>Tasks</i>
<b><i>Social areas</i></b>	<b><i>Encouraging improvements</i></b>	<i>Development opportunities</i>
	<b><i>Supportive atmosphere</i></b>	<b><i>Workload</i></b>
	<b><i>Colleagues</i></b>	<b><i>Stress</i></b>

*Table 2 - Prominent Factors in Characterising the Employee Experience in the Case Organisation*

#### **5.4.2 How do the factors interplay and impact each other?**

The social and supportive aspects were observed to occur as themes within all three dimensions of space. Further, a pattern of interconnection could be observed. For example, the participants highlighted that the open plan offices allow for both challenges and opportunities in terms of socialising at the workplace. Additionally, other social areas were mentioned as appreciated in terms of being able to socialise with their colleagues. In that sense, the perceived space allows for and is designed in a way that makes it possible for employees to enjoy the social aspects of work.

Further, when participants were asked to explain how they experience the organisational culture, the colleagues and supportive atmosphere were mentioned as prominent factors within the dimension of conceived space. For the results within the dimensions of lived space, nine of 14 participants highlighted that colleagues are one of the main reasons for being satisfied with their job. Similarly, it was highlighted that there may be challenges in terms of resource management for certain projects, which may cause stress and a higher workload for other employees. For this study, the factors of the lived space seem to be the result of the constructions and elements within the perceived and conceived spaces. In other words, the results indicate that the elements of the lived space are dependent on and created as a result of the designs within the perceived and conceived space.

The abovementioned illustrates how the factors within the dimensions of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad interplay, and indicates that the designs within the dimensions of the perceived and conceived space impact the content of the lived space.

## 6. Discussion

In this chapter, the results of this study are discussed. The results of the research questions as well as other remarks are elaborated on and discussed by comparing the results with previous research and the theoretical considerations.

### 6.1 The Characteristics of the Employee Experience

Several studies suggest that improving work-life balance, promoting employee well-being, and creating a positive work environment are important factors in enhancing employee engagement and reducing turnover. For instance, Abdulaziz et al. (2022) described that work-life balance and work overload affect organisational commitment. The negative factors that seemed most prominent in characterising the employee experience in this study were the workload and stress, which consequently may impact negatively on the organisational commitment. On the other hand, the positive factors mentioned in the results of this study about the employee experience were the colleagues, the tasks, the trust, as well as the development opportunities. Moreover, the social aspects in general as well as the support from colleagues and management appeared prominent throughout all dimensions. The aforementioned aligns with various results from previous research indicating that individual, social, and organisational factors influence workforce engagement (Schneider et al., 2018), and that supervisory support has a strong impact on work-life balance outcomes (McCarthy et al., 2013). Henceforth, the results of this study strengthen the suggestions and indications from previous research, although the factors have been explored through a different context and theoretical lens.

The aforementioned indicates that providing support at the individual level can lead to positive outcomes for employees as well as the organisation in terms of organisational commitment and turnover. On the other hand, the level of stress and workload can impact negatively on the organisational commitment.

The results related to the first research question - exploring what factors are most prominent in characterising the employee experience in an organisation - illustrate the possibility of using Lefebvre's Spatial Triad as an analytical tool for exploring and understanding what

elements of the employee experience that are most prominent. This is through the possibility of identifying recurring themes within all dimensions, which highlights and indicates the most important aspect among employees regarding their experience related to their working situation.

As the results are based on the thematic analysis conducted in this study, it is important to acknowledge that the empirical findings vary to different extents among the individuals participating in this study. For example, variation depending on job location and the extent to which participants worked from home varied due to the nature of the job. The question about whether participants spend the majority of their working time at home or the office was included to gain a better understanding of the working situation of the participant, and how that may impact their employee experience. Although this study does not focus specifically on the impact of working remotely on the employee experience, the results illustrate that this parameter is still of importance in considering the employee experience. The results indicate that social situations in the office are of great importance to many of the participants, and a prominent positive factor in terms of characterising the employee experience. Thus, employers should be considerate in terms of, for example, remote working policies.

## 6.2 The Holistic Approach to the Employee Experience

The three dimensions of space are interconnected and influence one another, and understanding their interrelationships is key to understanding how the social space is produced and experienced (Watkins, 2005), see Figure 1. For this study, the factors of the lived space seem to be a result of the constructions and design within the perceived and conceived spaces. In other words, the results indicate that the elements of the lived space are dependent on and created as a result of the designs within the perceived and conceived space.

The aforementioned emphasises the value of considering all dimensions of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad in designing the employee experience. Although, the dimensions for which HR practitioners can impact the most, seem to be the dimensions of perceived and conceived Space. Watkins (2006), implies that organisations primarily focus on the perceived and conceived dimensions of space while neglecting the lived experiences of the employees. However, as indicated by the results of this study, the reason for neglecting the lived space

might be due to the limited possibilities for HR practitioners to make tangible contributions within that dimension. For example, within the perceived and conceived space, an office layout or processes can be targeted for improvement rather easily. However, it is more challenging to directly impact the feelings and associations that employees have with different experiences and spaces. That is, it may be more reachable for HR practitioners to focus on the dimension of lived space through, for instance, targeting the designs of the conceived space. As described by Watkins (2005), the dimension of the conceived space includes the efforts of creating the representation of space, through for example maps, blueprints, ideologies, and different power structures. For instance, a type of “blueprint” could be produced in terms of initiating regular meetings and dialogues with employees, or between employees and managers, to understand the feelings and associations that employees have about different experiences and spaces. In that way, HR practitioners can identify areas for improvement that are interconnected to the other dimensions of the employee experience.

Applying the Spatial Triad as a tool for exploring the employee experience holistically, draws on similarities with the framework presented by Batat (2022). As previously mentioned, Batat (2022) provides a framework for the employee experience in which it is suggested that organisations should work with the employee experience based on three foundational pillars - personal entities, social entities, and cultural entities. Similar elements within the pillars, as explored in this study, are also explored by Batat (2022). Batat (2022) highlights elements such as relationships, physical and psychosocial aspects of the work situation, work-life balance, job satisfaction, career development opportunities, organisational culture, norms, and values, among other aspects. However, applying the Spatial Triad as a tool for exploring the employee experience holistically allows for exploring how the factors of an employee experience interplay and impact each other, and thus, provide HR practitioners with an integrated and complete portrayal of the employee experience in an organisation.

Moreover, much of the literature in terms of both the creating experiences, the customer experience, as well as the employee experience, are centred towards the customer or employee co-creating or co-designing their experiences in different ways. For example, Plaskoff (2017) draws on similar findings as the literature regarding the customer experience, and the importance of customers co-creating their experiences, suggesting that the process of



co-designing the employee experience refers to involving employees in the design process and considering their perspectives, opinions, and needs of the employees. In terms of the results of this study, several elements within the employee experience are co-designing. For example, several participants highlight that they experience they are supported when they suggest improvements. Additionally, participants mentioned they experience that they have a high degree of control over their work tasks. Further, participants mentioned they experience that there is a high degree of “freedom under responsibility”. Another aspect that can be considered as co-creating or co-designing the employee experience is the possibility to work remotely. However, this possibility varied among participants in this study due to, for example, the nature of work. By involving employees in the design process, organisations can create a more authentic and effective employee experience that meets the needs of employees and contributes to overall business success (Plaskoff, 2017).

Drawing on the aforementioned, there are also areas of improvement identified for the case organisation in this study in terms of co-designing the employee experience in the organisation. For example, the level of stress and workload may constrain the possibilities of co-creation, as employees might feel limited due to the workload. The co-creation or co-designing opportunities of the employee experience might be more important than they appeared in the interviews, as several elements of co-creation or co-designing shine through the results. As described by Wani, Malhotra, and Clark (2021), allowing customers to participate in creating their own experiences is a way to achieve customer loyalty.

### 6.3 Other Remarks

During the interviews, participants seemed engaged to a different extent. Some participants were more reflective and thoughtful during the interviews and felt more keen to take the opportunity to express their opinions. Some participants felt less interested in sharing their thoughts and seemed to answer them as shortly as possible to the interview questions. For example, three participants were certain to take the opportunity to make additions beyond the bounds of the interview questions. This indicates that participants cared differently about their employee experience which, in turn, may indicate that employee experiences are perceived differently among individuals.

As previously mentioned, it is important to acknowledge that the empirical findings vary to different extents among the individuals participating in this study. For example, the results indicated that many of the participants shared frustration regarding the processes and systems in the organisation. Although this factor was not stated as one of the most prominent factors characterising the employee experience in the organisation, it was certainly one of the most prominent factors within the conceived space. Overall, participants had a lot to say in terms of the questions within the conceived space.

Furthermore, the participants had worked for different amounts of years within the organisation. No significant differences in the results were observed due to this factor. However, there were slight indications of participants reflected more from a timeline perspective. On a similar note, several participants highlighted that their expectations of starting to work at the organisation did not align with what they actually experienced. Many participants described that their experience has changed over time. Lefebvre (1991) highlights that experiences are dynamic and constantly evolving, and they play a crucial role in shaping our perceptions of the world and our sense of place. The aforementioned indicates that employee experiences are perceived differently among individuals, and change and evolve.

## 7. Conclusion

This chapter starts by explaining to what extent the purpose and aim of the study have been fulfilled, followed by a section of the main conclusion of the findings and implications of this study to suggest what HR practitioners can consider in terms of the employee experience in an organisation. Lastly, the limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research are proposed, followed by some final reflections.

### 7.1 Research Purpose and Contributions

The purpose of this study was to obtain a holistic understanding of the employee experience by applying Lefebvre's Spatial Triad as an analytical tool, as well as to contextually visualise the concept of the employee experience and its characteristics. The study departed from previous research and theoretical applications and explored the concept of the employee experience from a new contextual perspective, as well as from a different theoretical perspective. Further, the study aimed to contribute both theoretically and empirically. Empirically, by providing insights for HR practitioners and HRM in terms of how to obtain a holistic understanding of the employee experience. Theoretically, by illustrating how the model of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad can be applied as a tool for analysing the employee experience in an organisation.

The results of this study illustrate a holistic, integrated, and complete portrayal of the employee experience in an organisation, providing HR practitioners with a better understanding of how the factors of an employee experience interplay and impact each other. Additionally, the results of this study have embodied the term "employee experience", by developing and extending previous research and conceptualisations in the field, both contextually and theoretically. For that reason, the purpose of this study has been fulfilled and the research questions have been answered and evaluated.

The study contributes to the field of HRM both empirically and theoretically. Empirically, by providing insights for HR practitioners in terms of the importance of considering multiple dimensions, factors, and spaces of the employee experience. Additionally, by illustrating how

the model of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad can be applied as a tool for analysing the employee experience in an organisation, which also contributes theoretically. Further, the study has illustrated an attempt to extend the traditional application of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad, which mainly has been focused on the physical space, and paid less attention to the abstract dimensions of the model. This study has demonstrated that experiences cannot be fully captured by exploring the physical spaces alone. The application of the Spatial Triad in this study has illustrated a more complex and comprehensive understanding of the model, by exploring both physical and mental aspects of an experience.

## 7.2 Main Conclusion and Implications

The findings of this study illustrate that social aspects, a supportive atmosphere among colleagues and management, as well as stress and workload, are the most prominent factors in characterising the employee experience in the case organisation. By providing support at the individual level and designing spaces for socialising and enhancing relationships with colleagues and management, positive outcomes may rise for both the individual and the organisation in terms of organisational commitment and turnover. On the contrary, high levels of stress and workload can negatively impact organisational commitment and turnover.

Additionally, the study illustrates how the factors within the dimensions of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad interplay and impact each other, concluding that the factors of the lived space are the result of the constructions and elements within the perceived and conceived spaces. In other words, the results indicate that the elements of the lived space are dependent on and created as a result of the designs within the perceived and conceived space. Hence, HR practitioners should recognise the value of considering all dimensions of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad in designing, targeting, and working strategically with the employee experience.

Lastly, the study illustrates the opportunities of using Lefebvre's Spatial Triad as a tool for analysing the employee experience in an organisation, obtaining an integrated and complete portrayal of the employee experience, providing HR practitioners with a better understanding of how to identify the prominent characteristics of the employee experience in an organisation, as well as how the factors of an employee experience interplay and impact each other. Overall, the findings of this study have important implications for HR practitioners

seeking to enhance the employee experience and improve employee engagement in their organisations. The results of this study can guide HR practitioners in terms of what dimension to approach to make improvements in a certain area and equip HR practitioners with an understanding about how this effort affects other aspects, dimensions, and spaces of the employee experience.

### 7.3 Limitations and Future Research

The research limitations of this study are mainly a result of the time and scope of the research project. Additionally, delimitations have been outlined to obtain more precise and accurate results, as described in section 1.3. For example, the sample size was relatively small, which may affect the validity and reliability of the results. A larger sample size would have allowed for more accurate results, and the inclusion of other occupational groups, or a comparison of different demographic groups, would have provided a broader perspective on the employee experience. Therefore, future research with a larger sample size and a more diverse group of participants could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence the employee experience.

Moreover, since the research approach and design is a descriptive case study, research limitations occur as the study has been conducted in a particular context. Although the study is being conducted in a particular context, the readers are provided with a nuanced image of the organisation and context, which allows the HR practitioners and researchers to consider how and get inspired on how to apply the theoretical and methodological approach, as well as the implications of this study, to another context. Thus, future research may explore the notion of the employee experience in other contexts, or compare different contexts.

Further, Lefebvre's Spatial Triad has been subject to criticism, as the theory has not been used as a tool for organisational analysis to such a wide extent. Although the theoretical model of the Spatial Triad allows for exploring the notion of the employee experience from a holistic point of view, other theoretical models may be applied to explore the employee experience. Therefore, future research should explore the use of alternative theoretical frameworks to further understand the employee experience.

Lastly, the “insider role” possessed by me as a researcher may cause a risk in terms of participants not being comfortable being honest in the interviews, for example, as I work for the company. If the researcher had been new to the contexts, and not known by the participants, the participants may have responded slightly differently. However, the insider role may also be beneficial, as participants might have felt more comfortable being honest in the interviews, for the same reason as previously mentioned.

## 7.4 Final Reflections

The results of this study illustrate a holistic, integrated, and complete portrayal of the employee experience in the case organisation, and provide HR practitioners with a better understanding of how the spatial dimensions of an employee experience interplay and impact each other.

The main insights from this study that I, as a Master’s Student and future HR professional, take with me into my working life, are the importance of considering all aspects of the employee experience, since they all interplay and impact each other. I will consider the importance of valuing and advancing the strengths of the employee experience in an organisation and working for improving the weaknesses. I will recognise the importance of involving employees in designing their employee experience, by listening, encouraging, and creating opportunities for employees to thrive and feel supported. By working strategically with the employee experience, employee engagement will improve, loyalty increases, and employee turnover decreases.

Is the term employee experience just another fashionable term within HRM? After conducting this study, I am confident that the term employee experience is here to stay. And, more than that, I am certain that the concept will gain increasingly significant meaning in the future due to the rapidly evolving and competitive business climate. The employee experience serves as a term, a concept, and a phenomenon which organisations can, and should, work strategically with.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A

### Interview guide

#### Introduction:

- Start by introducing myself and the purpose of the interview. Explain that the interview aims to explore and understand the employee experience in the organisation based on three main dimensions – (1) the physical environment in the workplace, (2) processes, systems and structures, and (3) the employee's overall experiences and feelings related to the work. Inform and ask once again if it is okay to record the interview and how that file will be handled. Inform the employee that the person can choose to cancel their participation at any time.

#### Perceived Space:

- How do you perceive the physical work environment, including the layout, furnishings and equipment?
- Do you experience any challenges or difficulties in your physical work environment? Have you addressed these challenges and how?
- Is there anything in your physical work environment that you find extra meaningful or significant? Why/how?
- How do you perceive the surroundings and the community where your office is located? What impact do you perceive this to have on your experience of working at this company?
- Where do you spend the majority of your working time? In the office or at home/remote?

#### Conceived Space:

- How do the organisation's processes and systems affect your daily work?
  - Potential follow-up question - what types of processes?
- Can you describe any situations where you felt that the systems and processes that exist hindered or facilitated your work?
- How do your organisation's hierarchy and decision-making processes affect your experiences in the workplace? From proposal to decision?
- How do the organisation's culture, values, and norms affect your experiences in the workplace? To what extent do you feel that these represent and align with your own values and principles?

#### Lived Space:

- How would you describe your overall job satisfaction?
- How does your work environment affect your mental and emotional health?

- How does your work experience contribute to your personal and professional development?
- How do you feel about the level of independence and control you have in your work tasks?
- Are there parts of your working life that you feel are more or less important? How?
- How would you describe your employee experience as a whole?

**General questions:**

- To what extent do you feel that your general experience of working here is in line with the expectations you had before you started your employment?
- How long have you worked in the company?
- What kind of education do you have?

**Summary**

- Summarise the interview and thank the employee for their time and participation. Ask the participant if it is okay to contact them if I have questions related to the interview, and mention that they are free to contact me at any time.

## Appendix B

Hi,

I'm contacting you as I wonder if you would be interested in participating in an interview for my master thesis?

In parallel with my job, I am pursuing my final year of the master's program in Strategic Human Resource Management & Labour Relations. The project "The Employee Experience" aims to explore the concept of "employee experience" and obtain a holistic understanding of the employee experience in an organisation. The ambition is for the results to help understand how the organisation can work with and improve the employee experience. I am contacting you because I am interested in your thoughts regarding your employee experience.

The interview takes about 30 minutes and will be conducted through teams. Participation is confidential and voluntary, and no personal data will be used or stored. During the interview, I will ask questions concerning, for example, how you experience your physical work environment, organisational culture, work-life balance and similarly.

If you are interested in participating, I will send you an invitation for a Teams interview and a form with further information about the thesis and your participation.

Thanks in advance.

## Appendix C

### **Information to participants about the student Master project “The Employee Experience”**

The aim of this project is to explore the concept of the employee experience and to gain a holistic understanding about the employee experience in an organisation, and the reason why this is interesting is because there is little research within the field, and I am now exploring the topic in a new context. In addition, the results will help to understand how organisations can improve the employee experience. I'm contacting you because I'm interested in your thoughts regarding your employee experience at the company.

This is a student project and will result in a thesis within the Master Program in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relation at the University of Gothenburg. The study is conducted independently by the student Alice Berggren, under the supervision of Monica Andersson Bäck, PhD in Work Science, Director CGHRM and Senior Lecturer at the Department of Sociology and Work Science at the University of Gothenburg. Please see further contact info below. The project adheres to the key ethical principles of the Swedish Research Council for research in social science research. For information about ethical information for participants please see below.

#### **Data Collection**

The data collection consists of qualitative interviews. Interviews are recorded with the permission of the participant.

#### **Voluntary participation and non-disclosure**

Participation is voluntary and confidential. Participants can choose to cancel their participation at any time and have a right to withdraw from the study should they wish.

Unauthorized individuals will not have access to the material and participants involved in the project are covered by professional secrecy. Personal names are not registered, and participants will be given a pseudonym and exchanged for fake names when interviews are transcribed and analyzed. Participants decide when it is suitable to meet (through Teams), and participation takes place on research participants' terms.

#### **Handling of collected material**

Material such as recordings and notes are kept locked away on password protected computers and are only available to authorised persons. Interviews will be transcribed. In the final thesis, extracts from interviews may be cited and interviewees are given a pseudonym [e.g., a fake name or a code]. The collected material will be used for the master thesis under the conditions described herein and may be published electronically by University of Gothenburg. Interview files once transcribed will be erased after the conclusion of the project

### **Results and publication**

The results of the study will be published in the form of a Master thesis that is planned to be completed in June 2023. Participants will be able to download the essay from GUPEA (<https://gupea.ub.gu.se>).

### **For questions and further information, please contact:**

Master Student, Alice Berggren  
alice.berggren98@gmail.com

Responsible Supervisor, Monica Andersson Bäck  
monica.andersson.back@gu.se



**Consent to participate**

I have read and fully understood the scope and implications of participating in this student MA project. Any questions I had were answered satisfactorily.

- I agree to participate, and that the interview can be digitally recorded and agree
- I agree to my personal details being handled as described above.

Date and place	Name and Signature (participant)
Date and place	Name and Signature (student)