The psycho-social work environment of e-sport professionals
– Applying the Job demands-resources theory to pro-players
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Abstract

In recent years, the area of e-sports has been growing rapidly and has consequently drawn attention from the general public as well as researchers. However, research in this area still remains sparse, especially concerning the psycho-social work environment of e-sports professionals. This is even more true when referring to research that includes the individual perspective of pro-players. To provide more knowledge in this area, this study aims to explore what psychosocial aspects are mentioned by pro-players in documentary interviews and investigate if the experiences portrayed could be understood using a theoretical perspective by applying the JD-R theory. This study is based on 12 docu-series episodes featuring two League of Legends teams where 10 different pro-players participated. The research sample could both be considered availability sampling, since the data was already available, and purposeful sampling, choosing a sample consisting of pro-players. The episodes were transcribed and then analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Many psycho-social aspects emerged from the analysis, resulting in two higher themes where the first theme “Working as a pro-player” portrays what the profession entails and the second, “The interdependent work”, depicts the experience of being a pro, a teammate and an individual at the same time. By applying the JD-R theory on the aspects mentioned, it was concluded that these experiences indeed could be understood using a theoretical approach, providing incentives to conduct future research in the area. Possible areas of research interest were also presented in relation to this.

Keywords: pro-players, e-sports, League of Legends, job demand-resources theory

Abstrakt


Nyckelord: professionella spelare, e-sport, League of Legends, teorin om job demand-resources
The psychosocial work environment of e-sport professionals

- Applying the JD-R theory on pro-players

Introduction

In e-sport, which is computerized competitive gaming, professional players compete against each other in virtual games for money incentives (Faust, Meyer & Griffiths, 2013). The best of the pro-players can make the activity into a full-time profession, hence making a financial living out of playing computer games. The work environment of pro-players has given rise to much discussion regarding potential effects on players’ mental and physical health. Their work is considered by many to be extreme, since players often work well over eight hours per day. For example, a relationship between work habits of a pro gamer and possible negative health factors such as workaholism and burnout has been proposed (Brook, 2017). At the same time, the players themselves report on positive consequences of their profession such as experiencing enjoyment in their field of work, being part of a team or feeling accomplished (Taylor, 2012). In competitive e-sports, there is the presence of occupational-, team- and organizational aspects that influence the work environment of individual players. This is important to consider when trying to understand the context of being a pro-gamer (Faust, Meyer & Griffiths, 2013).

The job-demand-resource model (JD-R) is a well-established theoretical model in organizational research (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The model poses a framework of how the balance between job demands and job resources influences aspects such as job strain, job motivation and individual health and well-being, which consequently affects job performance. The model takes both positive and negative work related aspects into consideration, as well as individual, group and organizational perspectives (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). This model might create an opportunity to gain a theoretical understanding of pro-gamers’ work environment.

E-sports are quickly growing and consequentially so is the money involved, making it a lucrative business (Brooks, 2017). Despite the growth of e-sports in recent years, there has been sparse research in the field (Faust, Meyer & Griffiths, 2013). The research that does exist often focuses on gains in cognitive or executive functions from gaming, leaving more to be desired regarding the understanding of the psycho-social work environment of pro-players. Research in this area mostly focuses on an outsider perspective. This might be due to the fact that being a pro-gamer is an uncommon and new profession and there’s difficulties accessing the players. Despite this, conducting research from an insider perspective is desirable to add new and deeper understanding (Faust, Meyer & Griffiths, 2013). In recent years, a growing body of documentary series have been made featuring pro-players and their teams (Taylor, 2012). This creates an opportunity to gain an insider perspective on the players’ psycho-social work environment based on their own experiences. By relating the players experience to the established JD-R model, a theoretical understanding of the pro-players’ psycho-social work environment could be explored and presented. This could be beneficial for the individual players, their teams, as well as their organization. This research could also help aim future research towards different aspects of the pro-gamer’s worklife to explore further.
Background

Job demands-resources

The job demands-resources theory (JD-R theory) is a theory that proposes that all work environments can be understood from two categories, job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The theory was developed from the Job demand-control (JD-C) model that in short suggests that perceived job demands and job control impact the employee experience of strain and well-being in the workplace. However, there was inconclusive research regarding the notion that higher job control can help fend against experienced job demands and strain. Based on this, there were indications that led researchers to believe that job control might not be the sole buffer between job demands and experiences of strain. The JD-R theory was therefore developed to capture a broader spectrum of resources as well as presenting a framework for how the interaction between the demands and resources might not only promote strain, but motivation as well. According to the JD-R, depending on how the job demands are perceived and which job resources are available to the employee, the balance between these two categories will impact the experience of motivation or strain and ultimately the work performance. The theory aims to capture a broad spectrum of employee well-being through these two processes of motivation and strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Simply put, being able to meet the required demands with the necessary resources results in motivation and a good work performance. Not being able to meet the demands due to insufficient resources creates strain, which could impair the work performance. The theory involves aspects of motivation, work engagement, work enjoyment, commitment to the organization as well as experiences of burnout in employees. It also gives a framework to understand and predict the consequences of experiences tied to the employees’ perceived work situation. Given the theory’s proposition, that all work environments can be presented by job demands and job resources, this makes the theory flexible and applicable to all occupations (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

Much empirical research has taken place in support of the JD-R theory. Job demands have been identified as a predictor of exhaustion (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Lewig, Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Dollard, & Metzler, 2007), whereas job resources have been found to be more connected to employee engagement or disengagement towards their work (Schaufeli, & Bakker, 2004). The research in support of the JD-R theory has also been subject to meta-analysis (Halbesleben, 2010). In general, the findings support that work engagement is negatively correlated to experiences of burnout and demands, but possibly associated with resources, showing further support for the model. The component job crafting has also been researched (Rudolph, Katz, Lavinge and Zacher, 2017). Job crafting is described as when employees through their actions alter work conditions or job tasks to lessen work related demands or making more job resources available. One study found a strong relationship between job crafting and work engagement, which is in line with the JD-R model (Rudolph, Katz, Lavinge and Zacher, 2017).

Even though there’s much research supporting the theoretical model, some criticism has also been raised (Barbier, Dardenne & Hanzes, 2013). For instance, many studies only focus on one aspect of the model at a time, limiting their findings to separated factors which negatively impacts a holistic picture. Specifically, there’s also a lack of longitudinal research, making the support of the experience of job demands, resources and the consequences of their balance for the individual temporary.
Presenting the theoretical framework

Job resources and job demands are presented as two different clusters that each have a separate connection to job burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Job demands connected to the workplace refer to the informal or formal requirements of performance in different aspects of the job. These demands can be physical, social, psychological or organizational. In order for the employee to meet the demands of the workplace, sustained psychological and physical efforts are required. These efforts consequently come at a cost, which can be both physiological and psychological and, depending on how high that cost is, it can either be developmental or detrimental for the employee. Job resources refer to different aspects of the job that promote personal growth, development, learning and goal-achievement. The resources can, similarly to job demands, be physical, social, psychological or organizational (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

The JD-R theory proposes that these two clusters, job demands and job resources, influence health impairment processes/strain and motivational processes in dual pathways (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In these pathways, job demands affect health impairment processes and job resources affect motivational processes. For example, job demands have been identified as a predictor of exhaustion whereas job resources are more connected to employee engagement or disengagement towards their work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Even though there are dual pathways to strain and motivational processes, the two clusters can potentially impact the other dual pathway (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Job resources have been found to potentially lessen the negative effects from job demands on strain. This means that if an individual is in a work situation where there are high work demands, but this individual has access to many work resources, the risk of health impairment/strain is reduced. Similarly, when job demands are high there is a stronger connection between job resources and motivational processes. This could be understood through the notion that when needed, as is the case when job demands are high, job resources are extra useful. Dealing with high job demands through the use of important resources can therefore create a stimulating environment that gives rise to motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

In terms of job resources, personal resources are an aspect that affects the perception of one’s job resources and vice versa (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In the JD-R theory, personal resources refer to the perception individuals have regarding their ability to impact or exert control over a situation. Optimism and self-efficacy are examples of personal resources that can lead to motivation through work engagement. Theoretically, optimistic and self-efficient employees are more prone to believe that a situation will result in a good outcome and perceive themselves as being in a position to impact or control that situation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

According to the JD-R theory, employees with high motivation could also exhibit work crafting behaviors (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). When work crafting, the employee is creating changes in regards to the job demands or job resources. For example, they could proactively ask for help and feedback, thus increasing the available job resources. The same possibility for crafting change in work situations is also true when it comes to reducing work demands. By job crafting, the employee can lessen the work demands and gain more resources which potentially can create a work environment where motivation processes can be upheld and promoted. In the health impairment process caused by high work demands, a similar feedback loop can be found in the JD-R theory. Employees with high strain both perceive and create more work demands for themselves, which is referred to as self-undermining. Self-undermining is the act of behaving in a certain way due to a stressful or strained work environment, which consequently causes obstacles and potentially undermines performance. An example of this is when being stressed because of high work demands leads to poor
communication with co-workers. This behavior potentially creates conflict between the co-workers or results in mistakes which, in turn, leads to even higher job demands and increases experience of strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Lastly, the JD-R theory proposes that job performance is positively impacted by motivation and negatively impacted by strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Employees that are motivated and goal-focused are engaged in their work, making them enthusiastic and energized which in turn can improve their performance. The opposite can also be true, exhaustion or health impairment caused by high work demands and strain could negatively affect work performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

**Application of the JD-R in practice**

The JD-R claims to be applicable to every job context. It has up until now not been applied in relation to an e-sports context, but it has been applied on traditional sports. For example, the study from Jones, Mahoney and Gucciardi (2014) identified resources, demands and indications of pathway processes. The research explored different perspectives on career transitions into higher rugby leagues in Australia by interviewing staff and players. Intrinsic motivation, having motivation coming from within the person at a psychological level, as well as extrinsic motivation, receiving motivations from outside sources at an environmental level, were identified as resources. Knowing what to expect and how to behave in relation to official job requirements and social roles as well as receiving social support from the team were seen as resources. The initial experience of transitioning, meeting changes of many sorts to play at a higher level, were generally perceived as demands. Injury was also frequently discussed as a demand. Supporting and enabling the players to balance work, mental health and social relationships were deemed important in order to maximize the resources in order to minimize the negative effects from high job demands.

**E-sports and pro-players**

Virtual gaming has become considerably lucrative for business (Rosell Llorens, 2017). Internet connections at home and the use of smartphones have created a solid foundation on which games are bought and played. This widespread usage of games has sparked the interest of the consumers and organizations of competitive computer gaming, also known as e-sports. In recent years, e-sports have experienced a rapid growth both in terms of viewers, competitors and parties of interest such as organizations and sponsors. The 2017 e-sport business was estimated to generate approximately 465 million dollars and involved millions of people all over the world (Rosell Llorens, 2017).

E-sports employ pro-players, for there can be no competitive gaming without professional competitors (Taylor, 2012). The profession often entails sitting in front of a computer for an extensive amount of time every day, playing and practicing in order to sharpen skills. Many pro-players are young males, who often start their career younger than twenty years of age. Nowadays, most serious e-sport organizations own gaming houses where the pro-gamers live together. This is especially common in e-sports that are team-based. In these gaming houses, the teams can focus on their improvement (Taylor, 2012).

Given the success of e-sports, there has been surfacing heated discussion regarding whether or not it should be considered a sport for all intents and purposes (Rosell Llorens, 2017). The discussion is characterized by the e-sports scene’s own efforts to gain more acceptance and recognition, through growing the platform and bettering the conditions for the professionals. A sport is commonly described as a game of skill which is represented in a
physical activity which also needs to have stability and a widespread following. This definition poses the biggest issue raised when claiming that e-sport is a true sport. The gaming takes place in a virtual reality, which raises questions on whether e-sports can be considered a physical activity. On the other hand, it can be argued that the competitors compete in a game regulated by a set rules. The competition requires skills such as strategy, body control and concentration, which might not be the typical attributes of physical activity but are nonetheless all elements in traditional sports practiced at a competitive level. Therefore, it may be concluded that e-sports have some similarities and differences with traditional sports (Rosell Llorens, 2017).

**Professional gaming: previous research**

Research regarding professional gaming, or even about playing videogames casually, has commonly focused on cognitive aspects (Faust, Meyer & Griffiths, 2013). For example, individuals who play action-based video games regularly show faster and more effective information processing when gaming compared to those who play casually (Dye, Green & Bavelier, 2009). Researchers have also concluded that first person shooting games (FPS) heighten body and mind arousal which makes the player more alert and provides them with faster reactions (Jeong & Biocca, 2012). These improved reflexes can also impact alertness in other everyday activities due to improved neurological connections.

Himmelstein, Liu and Shapiro (2017) focused on psychosocial factors when interviewing five highly skilled competitive players. By conducting a qualitative content analysis on the collected data, different mental obstacles that the players face as well as techniques they use to improve when gaming emerged. The study concluded that competitive players possess mental techniques that help them perform, and they actively try to improve upon those skills in order to improve as players. Staying motivated and being able to adapt to their competition were aspects that the players considered important for their own performance. Skills were reasoned to be acquired and developed through constantly analyzing performance and maintaining a mindset focused on growth (Himmelstein, Liu, & Shapiro, 2017).

The study also concluded that competitive gamers encounter obstacles such as limited ability to regulate emotions and trouble to perform under pressure. Team obstacles such as ineffective communication and lack of team reliance were also identified as obstacles. The competitive players also brought up the difficulty to balance life and gaming as a potential challenge that ultimately could affect performance (Himmelstein, Liu, & Shapiro, 2017).

Ji Kim et al. (2017) studied how collective intelligence (CI) in pro-gaming teams can impact the performance of the team. CI is described as the team’s ability to undertake and successfully complete a wide variety of tasks. Simply put, teams that perform well on a task are likely to do well on another, different task. The study is based on laboratory results where teams had to undertake certain tasks as well as on in-game data and self-reports. Emotional, interpersonal and fluent communication were found to positively affect a team’s CI. The study also concluded that the team is more likely to win if they exhibit higher CI. Lasting teams were more likely than temporary teams to show better game performance with CI as a mediator. In contrast to previous research, the results of this study showed no relationship between fluent and equal communication and CI in pro-gaming teams. The authors considered whether this could be due to the fast decision making that is part of the specific virtual game and concluded that hierarchy could, in this case, benefit adaption and reaction to the in-game events. Not surprisingly, teamwork showed a significant and positive correlation to CI in these teams, indicating that good teamwork and CI are related to one another.

Kahn and Williams (2016) performed a study on transactive memory system (TMI), which is a measure of group communication. The memory system is described as a mental
model of knowledge and expertise, which is shared within a group. These shared aspects include group processes of cognitive labor such as coding, storage, retrieving and communicating knowledge. TMI is developed through working together within interpersonal relationships and sharing explicit feedback, providing effectiveness and efficiency. The researchers concluded that there is a relationship between TMS and results. TMS was a positive factor which is considered directly related to winning, meaning that a team with higher cognitive interdependence and collective memory system is more likely to win. Teammates who know each other and can communicate well within the group perform better. In these teams, the individual players experience psychological involvement and perceive that their communication is understood by other social actors and vice versa, which creates security and efficiency.

Research aim

Given the growing area of e-sports and the questions raised regarding psycho-social factors related to the pro-gaming profession, this study aims to explore the following question using existing documentary interview data: How is the psycho-social work environment described by the pro-players and could these experiences be understood using a theoretical perspective?

Research questions: i) What different aspects of psycho-social work environment is mentioned by the pro-players in documentary interviews?, and ii) Could these different aspects be understood in reference to the theoretical JD-R model?

Method

Data

The data that will be used in this research consists of existing interviews regarding pro-players’ experiences during the 2017 season of League of Legends (see description below). The choice to use data regarding League of Legends pro-gamers was made due to the fact that it is one of the biggest e-sports at the moment. Consequently, it has a good amount of recent data available which facilitates conducting research on the subject.

The interviews are a part of an e-sport documentary series which documents the experiences of League of Legends teams and their respective individual members during a season. The content of the episodes includes individual interviews with team members regarding their experiences, performances or team processes. The episodes also include behind the scenes footage of team meetings and gameplay.

The chosen game: League of Legends

One of the most popular games in recent years is League of Legends ©, especially when referring to the professional scene (Taylor, 2012). League of Legends is a competitive online game where two teams fight to destroy each other’s bases in a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) (Riot Games, 2018). Each team consists of five players who control powerful champions with special abilities. To overtake the opposing team’s base and achieve the victory, the players must kill waves of minions who defend their respective team’s base. There are also defending turrets and inhibitors that need to be demolished in order for the team to destroy the opponent’s base. Besides that, the main way to achieve victory is to defeat the opposing team’s
champions, who fight to defend their base and at the same time challenge yours. Whichever team kills the main structure in the base, the nexus, will gain the victory (Riot Games, 2018).

In the beginning of each game, players on each team are assigned different roles (Riot Games, 2018). After the players have been assigned their role, they will pick a champion to play from an available champion pool of 141 champions (as of July 2018). This is called the draft. The teams will draft champions based on what strategy they are looking to play and what playstyle each individual player excels in. The roles, also commonly referred to as lanes, are top lane, jungle, mid-lane and bot-lane. The roles correspond to where the players play on the map at the start of the game. For example, a bot-lane player plays towards the bot side of the map. In a team, there are usually one top lane player, one jungler, one mid-laner and two bot-laners. Towards the middle and late game, the players often team up to fight together all around the map for objectives. The objectives are necessary to close in on the opposing team’s base and win the game. A game of League of Legends can range from between 15 minutes to an hour, with an average game length of around 30 minutes (Riot Games, 2018).

Sample and selection process

The choice of using existing data was made because of a number of factors. Firstly, existing documentary interviews were chosen to make it possible to access an otherwise difficult population due to their location and schedule. When conducting qualitative research on hard to reach populations, non-probability sampling methods are often used (Abrams, 2010). Convenience sampling is one of these methods where the availability of a certain kind of population or data decides which sample should be selected. In this thesis, using existing documentary interviews can also be described as convenience sampling. For example, the pro League of Legends scene in Europe is based in Berlin and the pro scene in USA is based in Los Angeles. Besides the geographically dispersed nature of the population, their schedule during the competitive season is intense, leaving little possibilities to find time to participate in interviews. In contrast, the existing documentary interviews meant the investigator could analyze the content thereof at leisure.

Purposeful sampling is deemed to be applied where the research aim serves as the indicator for which the sample should be selected (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbon, 2015). Because of this, the sample should consist of data or participants with the highest relevance to the research questions. In this thesis, the aim and the research questions motivate choosing data that explores the psychosocial work experiences of pro-gamers. The e-sport documentary series of the League of Legends 2017 season was therefore considered suitable. Two separate e-sport documentary series from 2017 featuring two different teams were chosen as the data sample. These two e-sport documentary series were chosen because they documented the experiences and thoughts of the players consistently and extensively over the 2017 season. The sample population consequently consists of pro-players from these two teams. Ten players are featured in this research, all males with an age ranging between 19 and 25. The possibility to access the pro-gamers perspectives in direct relationship to the events and challenges they were facing at that time, which is precisely what is done in the documentary interviews, was considered to be a positive aspect. This creates the possibility to assess the players psycho-social work environment as it is experienced and reported by them in relation to a “current” work situation. This reasoning, combined with the question of availability of the required data, were the main factors in choosing the sample by combining elements of purposeful- and convenience sampling. In conclusion, the sampling technique was purposeful in the sense that it was a purposeful choice to use data that depicts the work environment of
pro-players. It was also convenient in the sense that it provided a way to reach an otherwise
difficult population.

The available data for the whole season consists of 35 episodes and over 645 minutes
of material. Each episode is approximately 20 minutes long. The amount of data available for
the 2017 season made it necessary to conduct a sample selection in order to get a manageable
sample size. Since the League of Legends competitive season is divided into two separate
splits, each covering half of the season, selecting one targeted split was deemed fitting in order
to capture the players’ experiences as pro-players on a competitive team. In this research, only
episodes covering the summer split, the latter half of the season, were considered in the sample
selection. The teams represented in the documentary interview sample both qualified for the
World Championship, which makes the summer split particularly relevant to more largely
capture their experiences as pro-players in 2017. Both teams uploaded episodes more regularly
and frequently during the summer split, making the potential episode pool bigger for that
period. There were also some changes in regards to the player roster for both teams between
spring and summer split, possibly influencing the team dynamic. This factor also favors
focusing on one single split in order to possibly capture a more cohesive experience.

Team A uploaded 12 episodes during summer split and Team B 11 episodes covering
the same time period. Since both teams participated in the World Championship and since
episodes covering the World Championship were featured in special episodes at the end of the
season, the sample selection started from the end of the season to include their World
Championship participation. Starting from the last episode of the 2017 professional season,
every other episode from the summer split was selected in descending order. This resulted in
the inclusion of six episodes from each team, making the sample size twelve episodes in total.
For team A, episodes 1, 3, 5, 7, and 12 from the summer split was included which resulted in
77 minutes of content in total. Episodes 14, 16, 18, 20, 22 and 24 were transcribed from team
B’s summer split run, providing 141 minutes of content. The combined material therefore
consist of 218 minutes, which is a bit over three and a half hours and presented the material
used for analysis.

Analysis process

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the data. The method can be employed
on already existing data and the information generated by the analysis is considered both
exploratory and descriptive (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). This makes the analysis method suitable
in regards to exploring areas with previously sparse research. These aspects were the main
motivators behind the choice of qualitative content analysis as the analysis method for this
thesis project. The thesis aims to explore an area with limited research foundation by using
already existing data; the documentary interviews. Since this research aims to both explore a
situation, namely the psychosocial work environment for pro-gamers, and to then apply the
results to an existing theoretical framework, a combination of an exploratory and a descriptive
approach seemed relevant. Considering this, qualitative content analysis was deemed fitting
for the purpose of the thesis.

The analysis is conducted in different stages: identifying sentences of relevance to the
research question in the transcript, coding them, categorizing them and lastly thematizing the
categories (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). This allows for an analysis of both the manifest
content, the explicitly stated information; and latent content, the implicit information. In order
to analyze the latent content an interpretative approach is needed. The latent content is what
provides a holistic perspective of the analysis results. In the analysis process of qualitative
content analysis, previous research or themes formulated in interviews is not of significant importance when generating categories or themes (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

In the analysis procedure, the documentary episodes were watched and transcribed. In the transcription process, all interview sections and communication between team members were included, with the exception of the in-game communication. The player communication while in game was excluded due to it not being relevant to the research questions, since it to a large extent consists of tactical remarks. The transcribed material from the twelve episodes were then read through several times. During the reading process, sentences of relevance to the research questions were identified. These sentences were then coded in the next step of the analysis. Codes relating to the same aspect were then grouped together into categories. The categories were lastly thematized into lower themes as well as higher themes to illustrate the meaning of the content from a holistic perspective. The codes, categories and themes were revised and reworked multiple times in the analytical process before the current model was created. In total, 23 categories were identified, as well as seven lower themes and two higher themes which will be presented below in the results section.

Literature review

Google Scholar, PsycINFO and Umeå University’s own search engine were used to generate scientific articles and written sources. The majority of literature referred to in this thesis are peer reviewed articles but there are some exceptions. Since the research regarding e-sport, pro-players and pro-gaming is still sparse, some alternative content was allowed. For example, some research conference drafts and website articles were allowed to make up for the absence of scientific writings and provide a better understanding of the area.

Both used individually and combined, the most common search words were: “Psychosocial work environment”, “Job demands resources model”, “Pro-players”, “Pro-gamers”, “E-sports”, “Sport psychology”, “League of Legends” and “Professional gaming”.

Definitions

There’s many different definitions of the term psychosocial work environment and what it entails in research (Martin, Karanika-Murray, Biron, Sanderson, 2014). Most commonly though, it’s described as how the work environment is perceived by the employee and covers aspects regarding how we relate to and view our work and working conditions. This includes the individual’s perception and interpretation of the overall work situation based on psychological factors, social context and understanding of and attitude towards the organization. How the psychosocial work environment is perceived therefore depends on many factors, which is why the same work environment can be experienced differently by different individuals (Martin, Karanika-Murray, Biron, & Sanderson, 2014).

Ethical considerations

The documentary interviews are available on YouTube. Using data available on a public domain for research is allowed and does not necessarily require the consent from the content creator. Given this, there’s usually no need for this kind of research to be accepted or considered by an ethical committee (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). Even so, since the pro-gamers figured in these interviews and their organizations might not have considered or intended for the material to be used for research, some ethical aspects were taken into consideration.

Vetenskapsrådet (2002) mentions the need to: disclose information regarding the aim
of the study and the terms of participation to participants, get consent from participants, confidentially handle personal information and only use the information gathered for research purposes. Given these ethical principles, the teams responsible for the documentary interviews were contacted and notified via e-mail regarding the intent to use this material for research (see appendix 1). They received information of the research aim and they were given the possibility to access the completed research. The pro-players or team names were not disclosed in order to ensure as much confidentiality as possible. Based on this, some quotes have been slightly modified and the players’ names have been altered to protect their identity.
Results

The analysis process resulted in 23 categories, these became seven lower themes and eventually two higher themes. These higher themes will be presented below as well as their respective lower themes and categories. Flow charts illustrating these connections are presented in appendix two.

Higher theme - Working as a pro-player – the profession

The lower themes “Negative aspects of being a pro-player”, “Positive aspects of being a pro-player” and “Work requirements as a pro-player” describe the higher theme of “Working as a pro-player” in League of Legends. Being a pro-player comes with high demands to play and practice extensive hours a day, which requires high commitment and drive. The work also means coming into contact with negative criticism from teammates, coaches and fans. In many cases the players need to compete and perform even when physically unwell. The positive aspects balance against the negative aspects, making being a pro-player worthwhile despite its downside. Although being a pro-player is demanding, material perks such as high salary or very favorable living situations are provided. Playing at the highest level also entails becoming famous in the League of Legends arena and receiving attention and appreciation from fans. The profession also provides personal benefits such as getting to work in a competitive environment for those who love competing, playing a game that they are passionate about for a living, and receiving a sense of identity through their work. Being employed as a pro-player in the League of Legends arena also comes with specific work requirements that need to be met. Working in a team requires fitting in and creating a good atmosphere, communication and synergy with teammates. As a pro, there is also the constant focus on improving. Improving is viewed as important for progress and results, therefore striving for improvement in many different situations and outcomes as well as not becoming complacent is a vital part of the job. Another aspect of the profession is the requirement to publicly represent the team at events or creating sponsored content in order to provide exposure for the game, the organization, the team and themselves. The work conditions and professional requirements can also vary between teams and organizations, as indicated by some categories that were mostly evident in one of the teams.

Seemingly, although there are both positive and negative aspects of being a pro-player, it is neither all good or bad, but rather both at the same time. For example, even though bringing exposure to oneself and the team through sponsored content is annoying at times, it creates the opportunity for better material perks and fame. At the same time, being famous and a public figure in the e-sport arena may include receiving hate and negative criticism from the community. Even though the pro-players share a common career and basic work condition, factoring in individual differences in perceived personal benefits or organizational demands creates the possibility for an individual balance between positive and negative aspects in the work of a pro-player. The balance between the good and the bad, as well as whether the profession is worth it or not, could therefore be perceived differently by different individuals.

Lower theme 1. Negative aspects of being a pro-player.

This theme contains three categories which will be presented below, “Being a pro is demanding”, “Have to play” and “Facing hate and criticism”. These categories respectively contain aspects of what the pro-players described as downsides of their profession that they have to face in their work life. The common theme among these three categories is the negative aspects of being a pro-players, and it was accordingly named “Negative aspects of being a pro-
player”. In this theme the pro-players talked about different negative aspects that affect them professionally, that is to say, having an effect in their work as well as being personally taxing on them.

**Being a pro is demanding.**

The players of the docu-series talked about different demands that are present in their profession. One demanding aspect that was mentioned by several interviewees was the many work hours that the players have to put into their work. One pro-player mentioned this in relation to the workload before an international event, reasoning that intense work hours can take a negative toll on the players in terms of performance.

Jaden - “I think we reached a point where we were playing maybe ten scrims (practice games) a day or we were trying to do that. At last year’s boot camp in Korea everyone’s brains just completely shut off. You just can’t focus for that many games in a row.”

During the docuseries, it was not only demands from intense work hours and constant in-game focus that was mentioned. The interviewees also brought up aspects of personal demands on pro-players to be able to last in this field of work.

Aden - “Being a pro is a lot more taxing on your time and a lot more demanding of your… just like your personal determination, your discipline, your motivation, your focus from day to day. You have to have a lot of drive to be a pro.”

The word ‘sacrifice’ was used by one interviewee to describe his experience as a pro-player. In his case, sacrifice was discussed as a necessary means to realize his professional goals.

Calvin - “It’s actually funny because sacrifice is probably the biggest… Sacrifice is probably the biggest keyword in my e-sports life. I tend to sort of prioritize and put more focus on what I want to achieve rather than maybe uphold friendships or like connection or contact with my family.”

**Have to play.**

One thing that was portrayed in the docu-series was that being a pro-player comes with a responsibility to partake in the games. Sometimes this responsibility to play means playing even when feeling unwell. For example, on several occasions pro-players talked about playing games when feeling physically unwell, with conditions such as arthritis, nausea or deep sleep deprivation. Two of the interviewees mentioned playing with physical discomfort after participating in games.
Finlay - “So during the series I was actually not feeling that great because I had a stomach ache and it was probably because I eat delivery all the time and you never know. Sometimes the delivery just goes wrong.”

Declan - “I mean I’m pretty happy (about the results). I’m surprised considering I had like four hours of sleep, but yeah… and I’ve been sick the whole week.”

**Facing hate and criticism.**

Encountering strong negative criticism on performance from the public was discussed by the majority of the interviewees, especially in concurrence with a loss or an underperformance of some sort. The pro-players featured in the docu-series mentioned negative criticism directed towards the team’s performance as well as individual mistakes.

Bobby - “After Rift rivals I’ve seen so many both personal messages to me and like different websites or whatever, where fans are telling us to play new champions or different styles because we suck.”

Sometimes the criticism was so bad that it was referred to as receiving hate by the pro-players. One of the players also talked about experiencing being pinpointed by the general public as the scapegoat after a tough game series.

Trevon - “There was a lot of comments on my performance after these three games and I guess I didn’t really play that well but I was kind of surprised by those comments. I think everyone is really looking for that one mistake that lost the game and everyone just wants to pinpoint at that one mistake.”

**Lower theme 2. Positive aspects of being a pro-player.**

This theme, “Positive aspects of being a pro-player”, consists of three categories, “Perks”, “Personal benefits” and “Fame”. The content of these categories describes positive aspects and perks that the pro-players identified in relationship to their work. Some of these categories resemble other categories that will be presented in themes below. The distinction that has been made, for example between “Why going pro” and “Ambition”, is based on how and when the pro-players referenced to these positive aspects. The players mentioned positive factors in “Why going pro?” in direct reference to their choice of profession, whereas in later categories positive factors were not explicitly referred to in relation to the players’ profession. Another distinction that has been made concerns the categories “Fame” and “Recognition”, where the former is being talked about more as an external perk and recognition more as an internal motivator.
Perks.

Throughout the docu-series, many interviewees voiced appreciation towards some aspects of their life as a pro-player such as living in nice hotels when abroad, getting constant service from gaming house staff or eating at restaurants. Traveling both in the region and abroad was also considered exciting.

Ethan - “So finals in Boston is going to be pretty sick. I’ve never been to Boston before and I’m excited to see what it’s like there. I haven’t really been to the East coast that much so it’s kind of giving me a new perspective.”

One of the pro-players made a comparison between the life of his old friends from his hometown and his current situation, mentioning impressive living circumstances and high salary as a noticeable difference.

Bobby - “Like my friends for example were pretty mind blown seeing, you know, the gaming house because it’s so huge and it’s not something that you would live in normally. All of them are going to study now and they are going to have really small apartments and very limited amount of money to do with and stuff so it’s like… it’s like a different world.”

Personal benefits.

Even though being a pro has been identified as demanding, some of the pro-players reasoned that despite it being sometimes hard, most of the time it is worthwhile.

Bobby - “I guess what makes it worth it for me to be a pro-player is partly my love for the game and the whole idea and atmosphere on the team. Just being a team of five players and just being on a team working towards a certain goal is really, really cool.”

Different interviewees would put emphasis on different factors when reflecting upon why they chose to be pro-players. For some, as in the case with the player above, loving the game and enjoying being on a team were factors mentioned in relation to why he chose to pursue the profession. For others, love for competition was discussed as a major perk. Being a pro-player was also seen as giving a sense of purpose and identity. One of the pro-players made the following statement when comparing streaming during a hiatus in his career to being a pro-player.

Aden - “I’ve actually never had any regret or missing streaming since I’ve come back. It’s actually the other way around like when I was a streamer I felt like a part of my life was missing and I didn’t have… I just didn’t have a purpose to
my life… I think when I’m a pro I find a lot of fulfillment and I really love… I just love it.”

Fame.

Being a pro-player and having interactions with fans were re-occurring phenomena in the docu-series that were brought up a lot by the interviewees. The pro-players described instances where they received gifts from fans, words of support and actions of admiration. The following sequence describes a fan encounter outside the hotel, showing that there is a positive status factor involved in having fans as well. One team member attracts a lot of attention from fans and gets the following reaction from his teammates.

“Ethan – “Oh my god, look at all the fan girls following Jaden. Jaden with the fangirl army”
Multiple members – “(laughs)”
Ethan- “Jaden you are such a fucking stud!”
Jaden – “I had like 20 girls following me out.”
Trevon – “Oh my god, Jaden is the daddy!””

Lower theme 3. Work requirements as a pro-player.

This theme contains three categories, “Requirements of teamwork”, “Focus on improving” and “Public representation of the team”. Respectively and put together, the categories represent what the pro-players talk about as requirements in their field of work, honing in on aspects that they view and talk about as important approaches to have when being a pro-player. When reviewing important aspects in their field of work, pro-players factor in organizational attitudes or team culture, showing that organizational beliefs or profession constructs play a role in forming the work requirements. Two of the three categories, “Requirements of teamwork” and “Focus on improving”, are constructed on subcategories that will be presented under these respective categories.

Requirements of teamwork.

Working as a pro-player in League of Legends also means working in a team. The interviewees brought up different aspects of what is important to consider in terms of teamwork. Team atmosphere, communication and synergy were central subjects discussed by many players.

Team atmosphere.

Results were discussed as not being the sole significant factor when being part of a team. Having a good team environment and a good atmosphere were deemed important as well by pro-players from both teams. This is shown by one player, who reasons that even if the results are there, the team still has things to improve in terms of team atmosphere.
Calvin - “We are probably at a point where I feel that we can beat everyone in Europe but it’s still far from where I want us to be as a team. How we interact with each other, how it feels to be with each other and practice with each other.”

The quote above indicates the importance of developing a good team atmosphere. Another player, from the other team, brought up the importance of being able to adjust to an existing team environment.

Jaden - “When Aden first came back to the team in the beginning of summer it was similar to what I expected. He fit into the team really well because we all knew him, we were all friends with him and he was quick to adapt to the team environment.”

These two quotes show that team atmosphere and environment could be something that is both created together and adjusted to.

Communication.

Working on being able to communicate efficiently was talked about by interviewees from both teams, but it was a more frequent topic in team B. Communicating was discussed as important in terms of making plays and executing tactics in-game, as well as for developing new strategies and laying a foundation for individual and team improvement. One pro-player talked about communicating as a means of providing more points of view to help the team, as long as not too many players trying to decide upon different plays at the same time in-game.

Jaden – “I might see one thing one way but it’s good to have another big voice like “what about this or this” and it really spawns a lot of conversation. I don’t think it’s an issue having three people that communicate a lot because it’s not like we have to shot call all at the same time, you know.”

Synergy.

Having synergy together with the rest of the team was brought up as an important factor in terms of team performance by several interviewees from both teams. For example, one of them made a reference to the importance of being on the same page just before an important game.

Saul - “So we are on week 2, about to play, it’s pretty much nothing else to say it’s mostly about being on the same page for us and as long as, yeah, that works out and we have an overall good day I believe we can do it.”

In the docu-series, one of the pro-players looked back on the experience of playing with a teammate with which he had bad synergy. The teammate eventually had to leave due to poor
synergy with the rest of the team, indicating the significance of having synergy with teammates in a competitive industry.

Aden - “Looking back it was kind of obvious (that the teammate was let go) in a way because we never had good synergy as a bot-lane and he didn’t fit the team strategically either. Overall, he didn’t really fit the team very well.”

**Focus on improving.**

Prioritizing constantly improving gaming skills and game knowledge was prominent in the docu-series. The interviewees discussed why learning from experience is important as a pro-player as well as when and where that learning occurs. Not becoming complacent was also seen as an important factor when it came to continuous growth.

**Importance of learning.**

Continuous learning and improving were seen as important aspects by the pro-players. Both teams talked about how bettering themselves as players and the team as a whole would improve their chances of winning and achieving results. One of the players also mentioned the importance of trying to make the best of every situations in terms of learning, even in difficult situation, in order to be a top team. Jonas made the following statement when his team was struggling in a competition.

“We are the better team, we are one of the best teams, we should take every opportunity we have to try to improve and become good at the game.”

Constantly learning and improving was also seen as a decisive factor regarding reaching the goals set up by the team and their organization. This is shown in the following quote, where one pro-player discussed the results from a game in relation to the team's efforts to improve and to reach or fulfill certain goals.

Finlay – “It’s good to see if we are a lot further from where we want to be or if we are a lot closer or if we are almost there and we just need to have that last sprint where we improve on a lot of things.”

**Where learning comes from.**

According to the pro-players, improving meant learning from their experiences. One team in particular, team B, were reflecting during the docu-series in regards to where learning and improvement came from. Learning from practice and working hard was brought up as an instrument towards improvement by the pro-players. Losing was also considered as a means to give knowledge on what to work on in the future.
Ethan - “Comparing it to last year’s Worlds, both are pretty depressing and there’s lots to learn from both losses. There’s not much you can do anymore, it’s in the past and you have to focus on the future in order to become better.”

Acquiring strategies from other teams was also mentioned in reference to learning. For example, one of the pro-players talked about the team's decision to keep an open mind when facing opponents in order to learn from them.

Aden - “It’s good that everyone was thinking that we should actually keep an open mind to things like we wouldn’t normally try. Every team at Worlds is really good, obviously the best in their region. There’s something about them that makes them world class teams and if you keep an open mind you can learn a lot from every match, every scrim.”

*Don’t get complacent.*

Complacency was brought up as a potential threat that could hamper learning and improvement.

Jaden - “When I see a lot these appreciation threads for teammates, always a bit worried that it might make them complacent. One thing in the last six months that I’ve seen from Finlay is that he still realizes what his faults are and what he needs to improve on, especially in this split.”

In the quote above, it’s exemplified how one of the team members stresses the importance of staying humble in order to realize what weaknesses they have as players. In that sense, staying humble enables the players to better themselves and improve, showing the importance of not letting success go to their head as pro-players.

*Public representation of the team.*

Being a pro-player also entails participating in team content and representing the organization publicly. In the docu-series it is shown how members of both teams participate in sponsored videos or team content, such as the docu-series themselves, promoting their team and organization. The pro-players also participated in events such as meet and greets after games and recorded announcements, adhering to the will of the organization. One example of this is described below, where some players react to an announcement they have to record.

“Staff – “It sounds cringy (in reference to what the players should say) but it’s actually okay, don’t worry.”

Coach – “This is the players’ favorite part of the day (sarcasm). Coming here, doing their commitments for interviews and fan meets.”
Saul - “Oh my god…”

Calvin – “Aaah!”

Saul - “I’m sure other players get so much better treatment.””

Higher theme – The interdependent work – being a pro, a teammate and an individual

Experiences of “Being part of an e-sport team”, “Emotions in relation to work”, being in “A competitive profession” and “What motivates a pro-player” overlap and together they describe the interdependent work of a pro-player. Pro-players experience hardship in the team such as arguments as well as having to make compromises that can be both directly game related and indirectly game related. At the same time, being part of the team means receiving social support and experiencing emotional solidarity. These experiences are tied with the emotional aspects of experiencing positive, negative, instantaneous or lingering emotions. These emotions also need to be handled and managed in order to not get affected and risk losing focus, which might have a negative impact on the performance. This focus on the importance of performing constantly is central in the competitive profession. In a fast changing game, the players need to be equally fast in changing their playstyle and in adapting to what strategies other teams are developing, putting high pressure on the players and creating stress. This results in emotions that yet again need to be handled in order to perform under pressure and to not give in to stress. Recognition, own ambition, the possibility of getting revenge and the opportunity to measure strength were described as motivators for pro-players to push themselves and their team. At the same time, a competitive profession creates the possibility to, for example, become motivated by recognition and fulfilling own ambitions through performing together with teammates, which also in turn creates positive emotions.

Being a pro-player in a competitive field, coupled with working and living together with teammates in a high pressure performance profession with fast changing work conditions describes an intense work situation. This is even more prominent due to the existence of frequent and strong emotional reactions towards their work that the players need to deal with. The pro-players persist under these work condition partly because of their motivation. Their drive enables them to push through in this field of work. Their work also rewards them in success, creating more motivation and positive emotions that provide energy. The interdependent work of a pro-player therefore contains the experience of being a pro-player, a teammate and an individual simultaneously in an intense work environment.

Lower theme 1. Being a part of an e-sport team.

The theme “Being a part of an e-sport team” describes the players’ experiences when working in a team. This theme is similar to the earlier category “Requirements of teamwork”, but concerns and includes perspectives on how it is like to be in an e-sport team rather than what teamwork is in this profession, giving a bigger emphasis on experiences instead of expectations. This theme contains four categories, namely “Facing hardships in the team”, “Receiving social support from the team”, “Making compromises for the team” and “Emotional solidarity”, which will all be presented below. The common thread between these categories is experiencing something in relationship to teammates or shared experienced with the team, where the focus lies on a team perspective.
**Facing hardship in the team.**

Experiencing hardship in the team was talked about by interviewees from both teams, although the shape of the hardship could differ between occasions. Sometimes, it was described by the pro-players as conflicts within the team both regarding player to player conflicts and player to coaching staff conflict. During the docu-series, the conflicts were caused by different factors, such as failing communication between members or disagreement regarding how to play the game, which one of the pro-players mentioned.

Saul - “There was a lot of disagreement about the game and the way we wanted to play it. I felt really unfocused going into the game, so, honestly I didn’t even feel like playing the game. It was just extremely bad so…”

Hardship could also arise from stagnation or not being able to execute what has been practiced.

Aden - “It’s frustrating because it’s all we do. We spend 12 hours a day every day and we are just talking about the game, we are watching the game replays, we are practicing and then when we go on stage it’s like the test and we just can’t… can’t show any results.”

In many occasions where hardship was brought up by the pro-players or displayed in the docu-series, the experience contained both a shared team experience as well as an individual perspective. For example, aspects of “we all did this together” were brought up together with perspectives of “how it affected me”, for example losing focus or becoming frustrated.

**Receiving social support from the team.**

Positive social relationships among teammates were shown by both teams. For example, one of the pro-players described his relationship to teammates and compared them to family relationships. He also brought up how he had helped a teammate during their time together on the team both regarding personal support and game-related support.

Calvin - “Declan is like a little brother. Last split I sort of were around him a lot and I helped him with pretty much everything. I was helping him with, you know, in game stuff and out of game stuff. At this split I’m sort of at the stage where the older brother is just pissed at his little brother 24/7 (laughs). I’m just like everything he does I’m sitting there shaking my head, like, can you just not? Please stop (laughs).”

Aside from social relationships and experiences of supporting teammates, aspects of friendships and having fun together were also demonstrated by the pro-players. Making jokes and sharing laughter was a big part of the interaction between teammates during the docu-
series, both when it came to making references to the game or making fun of each other. The sequence below shows the team reminiscing over past experiences together in a positive manner.

“Aden – “Jimmy (team’s owner) still doesn’t know how to say Sejuani”
Multiple members – “(Laughs)"
Jaden – “Immitates Jimmy) “Did we know they were playing Seuuani? We never play against Seuuani do we?”
Aden – “Jesus, that was a good meeting. I was the only one who had the fucking balls to tell him he was wrong. Everyone there is just trying to stop laughing. He was probably wondering why everyone was laughing at his very arousing speech.”
Multiple members – “(Laughs).”"

Making compromises for the team.

Experiences of making compromises in relationships with teammates were described by players on both teams. For example, compromises were described as being ready to make game related adjustments for the greater good of the team.

Ethan - “Now that Aden is back I kind of have to balance it because we both call for resources a lot. It kind of messes up with our teamplay because we both want jungle pressure at both sides of the map but Trevon can’t be at two places at the same time. We have to balance it out.”

Putting the needs of the team before one's own was also mentioned by many interviewees in the docu-series, bringing the aspect of making personal compromises that sometimes stretched outside of gaming into light. These compromises could mean abstaining individual needs if it would help the team, which is described below by one player.

Calvin - “I’ve come to kind of realize that it doesn’t really matter as much how I’m viewed but more like how my team is viewed. Obviously I’ve felt underrated and I still feel underrated by the community and just pro-players in general, but when I think about it it’s like… they are never going to know what I bring anyway so in the end of the day I’m just going to make sure that my team is the best that it can be and that’s what I’m going to do.”
Emotional solidarity.

Interviewees from both teams described experiences of sharing emotional moments with teammates, whether that be emotions of frustration, happiness or sadness. Having emotional solidarity with teammates was described in a powerful manner by the pro-players both regarding experiencing higher highs and lower lows. The impact of the emotional solidarity also seemed based on context, where players mentioned shared emotions more often in relationship to important games or experiences. In the quote below, pro-players from both teams talk about sharing emotions with teammates during an international tournament.

Aden - “That was the most depressing meal I’ve ever had with my team. We just sat there, we didn’t say anything. We couldn’t watch the game from the lunch area so we were just kind of eating. The food was bad, we felt bad and we didn’t really want to talk to each other. We were just sitting there and you would here the utensils scraping the plate.”

Bobby - “I don’t even remember the game to be honest. I barely remember any of it. I only remembered what happened after, like right when we won the game. Suddenly everything just explodes and all of the team is storming the stage, we are all so happy. That’s what I remember, I don’t remember much about the game.”

Lower theme 2. Experiencing emotions in relation to work.

This theme is based on three categories, “Negative emotions in and out of game”, “Positive emotions in and out of game” and “Managing the mental state”. Taken together, they describe how pro-players face emotions steaming from their work and how these emotions, as well as the players’ mental state, need to be handled in order to execute the task, i.e. to play the game at the highest level.

Negative emotions in and out of game.

Many of the pro-players described experiencing negative emotions in direct relation to in-game events, such as anger when underperforming or irritation towards other teammates.

Jaden - “Game 2 we pretty much won of their team just walking into our team instead of away from our team which obviously doesn’t feel very good. I was really upset, kind of angry even during the second game which I know I shouldn’t be.”

Experiencing emotions even long after a game has been played was also mentioned by the interviewees, bringing to light the existence of both a shorter-term perspective of emotions
and a longer-term one in relationship to their work. One pro-player made this reference to the team’s performance two weeks after the actual events.

“All we wanted was to play at Rift Rivals and that was our mindset on our team… so at least myself I still have bad… feelings about the events.”

Another aspect that was brought up by pro-players from both teams was that even though the results of a game might have been good, the emotions experienced did not always match the outcome. Therefore, winning or losing is not always the most important factor; how a game is played is also impactful on the players’ emotional experience during their work.

Aden - “Even though we won Rift Rivals and we came back and went 2-0 this weekend without dropping a game, the way we won those games was really bad. Our scrims have been going pretty badly as well so it doesn’t feel good when the result, which is positive, does completely contrast from the way the team actually is.”

**Positive emotions in and out of game.**

The pro-players also shared experiences of positive emotions in relationship to their work. Similarly to the time perspective of negative emotions, positive emotions were both referred to as sometimes more instantaneous or more lingering, which is exemplified by the quotes below.

Jonas - “I was probably more excited than ever before. I felt like I had no control over my own body, what I was saying, what I was doing. It just kind of happened automatically and I screamed out of joy and started jumping in the air.”

Finlay - “During Summersplit of 2016 you know we pretty much had a dream run where we were performing super, super well and we had a really dominant split. Arguably one of the most dominant split that the region has ever seen and I was just really happy the whole season to be there.”

Experiencing positive emotions in relationship to their work was also shown as being related not exclusively to results. Viewing one's own effort and performance as worthy was important when experiencing positive emotions such as pride and happiness for qualifying to the world championship, as described by one pro-player.

Jonas - “It just felt like back then I just kind of assumed that we would get to worlds. Now it feels so much better. Now it feels like I had to fight for it. My
first year… I mean I was a good player but I wasn’t really “the one”. I was kind of coming along to worlds you know but now it feels… way better.”

**Managing the mental state (handling one's emotions).**

Many pro-players talked about being able to keep a good mental state and not being affected by losses or by making a bad play in a game. Keeping a mental edge and being in a better mental state then the opponents were considered a strength and a positive factor when going into a game series. Not becoming tilted, meaning losing control of one's mental state and emotions, was seen as important since it potentially could affect the performance and in turn the results. One of the pro-players reflected upon a previous experience of playing many games in a row on the same day, reasoning that it is important to not let previous games affect you as a player but that it can be difficult.

Trevon - “It becomes so hectic that you don’t really have time to prepare for the next game and your mentality can’t get affected by the previous game. If you lost then you really just can’t be tilted or something. I think last year we really weren’t prepared for it, or I wasn’t.”

Performance during previous games was not the only mentioned aspect that potentially could impact the players’ mental state. Arguments within the team was also mentioned as a possible factor.

Jonas - “Losing to YG (opponent) was harder than usual, because I felt like our loss against YG was more on us not being in the best mental state. I feel like the heated discussion that we had between the HKA (opponent) game and the YG game just took such a toll on everyone including myself.”

**Lower theme 3. A competitive profession.**

This theme, “A competitive profession”, consists of three categories “Keeping on top of the game”, “Pressure to perform” and “Stressful situations”. The categories portray the experience of working in a competitive environment where the results, winning or losing, define how successful one is in their profession. This actualizes the need to constantly being updated on the game and performing at a top level which creates pressure and leads to stressful situations.

**Keeping on top of the game.**

Keeping ahead of the opponents, predicting what they might do and be prepared for it, and at the same time trying to stay unpredictable for the opponents, were all aspects that were brought up by pro-players from both teams. This is exemplified by one pro-player, who, when asked what he wished to practice especially before an important tournament, talked about preparing strategies for what other teams might be playing. He also shared the experience of getting out-predicted at last year's World championship.
Jaden - “I want us to be able to adapt efficiently. I feel like we were really bad at the meta (knowing what strategies to play) last World’s. I feel like we never knew what was good. The enemy team always had counters to what we were playing but we didn’t really have counters to what they were playing.”

Experience of the same consequences, getting out-predicted and losing, was also mentioned by interviewees from team A.

Bobby - “We have been playing this style for so long at this point and we made it work really well here (in their home region) and suddenly teams just finds ways to abuse it to an extent where it’s actually really hard for us to win the game.”

The need of constantly staying ahead of what strategies are strong, what strategies other teams might be playing and coming up with counterplays to what other teams are doing is therefore seen as an important aspect in the worklife of pro-players.

**Pressure to perform.**

The pressure to perform and win was evident in the docu-series and talked about by many interviewees from both teams. Performing in both the regular season’s group stage matches as well as potential season playoffs and the World Championship put pressure on the players during every game, which was described by one pro-player.

Calvin - “Something that I’ve learned is that every game matters, you know. You get to the end of the season and you are like, oh we have to win this game. That wouldn’t be the case if you just won another game so I think every game is important especially when you are against the team you are competing for the top spot with. I think tomorrow’s win could be equally important as a World’s spot.”

The extent of the perceived pressure was described to vary based on the context and the importance of the game. For example, experiencing pressure to perform during “do or die” situations was more frequently talked about than games where the stakes were lower. Pressure to perform, not only to win or lose but to live up to the expectations, was also mentioned by many pro-players. Lastly, experiencing a need to behave in a certain way towards the team or fulfilling a specific role within the team was brought up by one player from team A.

Calvin - “I have my bad days you know and… I’m not proud of those days I actually feel really bad about those days. I have many days that I bring a lot of energy I bring a lot of energy to the team. I feel like it’s necessary that I
especially do this. If I then have one or two days a week, that’s already way too much. I can’t even have one day where I’m not bringing a 100 percent.”

**Stressful situations (being overwhelmed).**

During the docu-series the pro-players talked about how working in a competitive industry also led to stress. For example, not being able to sleep out of nervousness before games was mentioned by many players from both teams.

“Team manager - “Declan is really trolling. I go to the bathroom at 3 am last night and he is watching Vampire Diaries on his computer.”
Declan – I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t sleep.
Team manager – “Oh really?”
Declan – Yes, I was too nervous so I couldn’t sleep.”

The experience of feeling that there could have been more preparation before a game series was prominent, even though extensive practice had taken place. Being scared to lose or underperforming during important matches were other aspects that were talked about by players from both teams. For some, this fear was described as being on their mind quite frequently and not just before the important performance itself, showing the experience of sustained stress. This was the case for the pro-player whose quote is presented below, since he made the statement around six weeks before the actual event would take place.

Aden - “I feel like everyone has their fears and a lot of problems. For me I’m just afraid that I’m not going to play well at World’s and that I’ll make a lot of mechanical mistakes or that I’m going to make a lot of decision-making mistakes or maybe my champion pool won’t be right. You know, maybe I’m not even good enough.”

**Lower theme 4. What motivates a pro-player.**

The theme “Motivational aspects” consists of four categories, “Recognition and respect”, “Ambition”, “Proving oneself” and “Measuring power”. These four categories respectively and together contain motivational aspects mentioned by the pro-players. This theme gives an insight into why the players chose to do work as professional gamers and what drives them.

**Recognition and respect.**

The interviewees in the docu-series described getting recognition or respect from various people as a motivator in their profession, whether that be viewers, peers, teammates, organization or family. For example, one of the pro-players talked about experiencing his family coming out to an event and watching his games. Another player mentioned his own will to perform well in order to get respect and recognition as a player.
Trevon – “My family came to visit and saw the tournament. This is one of the first times where my family has been at an event so they could experience how much time we put into it and just all the things we put into it they could see it. We went on for the whole day so it’s a lot of work and it made it a positive experience too… get to share the hard work with them I guess.”

Bobby – “I want to keep playing well myself so that they will start respecting me and viewing me as one of the better players in my region.”

Ambition.

The pro-players’ own drive to become successful was also a discussed motivator amongst the interviewees. The different players talked about their own professional and personal desires in relationship to their work. Sometimes those ambitions were in line with those of the team or the organization and sometimes they were more individual.

Bobby - “So I don’t think people know me really. My dream now is taking down top teams and getting back my team’s throne. I want to be the greatest.”

Jonas - “I’ve come to a point in my career where I’m no longer satisfied with mediocrity. Like I’m good enough to be there and I’m good enough to be a part of the big games.”

Proving oneself.

Personal success and praises were not the only aspects viewed as a work motivator for the players in the docu-series. Having a chance to show one's skill and worth as a player as well as proving critics wrong were brought up by pro-players from both teams as a motivator. One of the players made the following statement when talking about being rejected when trying out for a team.

Finlay - “They said I wasn’t good enough. They picked another person and I was really sad but I guess it was motivation for me to keep going because I knew I wasn’t good enough, and I don’t think I was, so I just tried harder to get better.”

Being able to redeem their reputation and standing as a player after a bad performance was also mentioned by the pro-players as drive to work hard, showing the importance of proving their worth as players both for others and themselves.
Aden - “It’s going to be the same situation where we are going to be competing with the best. It’s going to require us to be able to perform at a level that, you know, we are expected to and being able to perform even better than that so we can, you know, wash away the stains from last year.”

*Measuring power.*

Many pro-players talked about having the chance to measure their own and the teams’ strength against peers as a drive.

Bobby - “I’m not really sure what I’m actually capable of and how strong our team would be like internationally, for example. Playing in Paris would be crazy and I would love going to Worlds as well and experience the competition.”

Wanting to not only measure the strength against opponents, but rather outperform or crush other teams was also described by the pro-players. Sometimes this will was mentioned to stem from competitive rivalry between teams and sometimes it was about sending a general message to others about the strength of oneself or the team.

Jaden - “I want to be the type of team that when we play against a team that we are better than, we just completely dominate them and give them no chance to come back in the game.”

**Analysis**

**Applying the JD-R theory**

Different psychosocial work aspects related to being a pro-player in League of Legends were presented by the pro-players in the docu-series. The specific nature of the work and the inter-dependence of team members (Higher-order themes of “Working as a pro-player” and “The interdependent work”, respectively), emerged as the most prominent overall themes, which describe what it is like to work as a professional player in the e-sport industry. The JD-R theory claims that all work environments can be understood using its theoretical model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). This following section will explore whether different aspects that have been presented in the results could be understood in reference to the theoretical JD-R model.

Physical, social, psychological or organizational job demands consist of formal and informal requirements of performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Based on this definition, it can be argued that many codes presented in the data can be understood as work demands. For example, in lower themes such as “Negative aspects of being a pro-player” and “Work requirements as a pro-player”, the players mentioned formal requirements such as working a certain amount of hours every day or publicly representing the team. These could be described as job demands in accordance with the JD-R theory. Furthermore, these demands could arguably be defined as formal organizational job demands – demands that emanate from the
specific job content and organizational role that players need to fulfill. Regarding informal work demands, which may be described as emanating from within players themselves, and from the psychosocial and interpersonal work environment, the pro-players brought up aspects such as feeling pressure to fulfill certain roles in the team or the need to manage their mental state (as shown in the categories “Pressure to perform” and “Managing the mental state”). This might explain why the players sometimes felt pressured to behave in a certain way, for example to always bring energy to the team or not give in to anger.

Job resources promotes personal growth, learning and goal achievement according to the JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). The available job resources also interact with personal resources to create the full range of available resources which can be social, psychological, physical, informal or formal. The pro-players discussed different positive aspects of their work that possibly could be material perks. Based on the JD-R model, high salary, getting to travel for the purpose of work, being famous and receiving day to day service could be reasoned to be formal job resources and material perks. These resources could be considered formal due to the fact that they are tied to specified work tasks, such as competing abroad (which is mentioned in the category “Perks”), or other formal arrangements, for example appearing in sponsored content (as shown in “Public representation of the team”). The players also talked about perceived personal benefits from being a pro, such as developing a sense of identity (“Personal benefits”), becoming famous (“Fame”) or experiencing social support from teammates (“Receiving social support from the team”). These resources could possibly be understood as informal job resources since they are not explicitly tied to the pro-players work tasks, even though they clearly are consequences directly tied to their profession.

The JD-R theory proposes that the job demands and job resources interact, so that resources are employed to balance the demands. Based on how the balance falls between these two categories, the employee might experience either strain or motivation in relation to their work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). One of the lower themes that emerged from the docu-series was “Motivation as a pro-player”, which indicates that motivational processes can be identified in the profession of a pro-player. For example, diving into the category “Proving oneself”, one of the players talked about how getting rejected from one team motivated him to try harder and become better. In his case, it can be argued that he did not have the necessary personal resources, in this case skills, to meet the formal job demand of playing at a certain level. Instead of experiencing heavy strain in this situation and quitting his job as a pro-player, he turned the obstacle into a source of motivation. Perhaps this situation can be understood in the context of the JD-R theory, where Bakker and Demerouti (2014) propose that the total available resources act as a protective mediator between the high job demands and lessen the experience of strain. This player might have had many other available personal resources such as optimism or self-efficacy to support him when the job demands were high. As a result, this player might have perceived the situation not as a source of strain, but of motivation, which helped him become better at the game and eventually getting picked up by another team.

In regard to the opposite scenario in the JD-R theory, when the balance between job demands and resources weighs heavier on job demands and creates strain, there were no lower themes which were identified solely as strain. However, this does not necessarily indicate that the players do not experience strain in their work environment. One of the players described experiencing frustration when the hard work that the team put into their job did not show any results (as described in the theme “Hardship in team”). Based on the JD-R theory, this situation could possibly indicate that the available resources did not allow for him and his team to meet the demands, which created a process of strain. For example, he might have been lacking personal resources such as the ability to manage emotions or job resources based on synergy while at the same time experiencing high work demands with pressure to improve and win.
Failing to live up to these expectations, meaning not having enough job resources to meet the job demands, caused the player to experience strain, which was expressed through frustration. Taking the analysis a bit further, perhaps the poor performances from the player and the team were direct negative consequences of experiencing this strain. This is in line with the JD-R theory which suggests that strain eventually leads to poorer work performance.

Processes of positive and negative job crafting, where motivated or strained employees alter their work situation to create more resources or less demands according to the JD-R theory, were seemingly more difficult to identify based on the results. Perhaps these processes were difficult to identify since they are presented within dynamic feedback loops, making them a bit more intricate and hard to explore due to the docu-series’ pre-collected data, which in essence described a ‘static’ event that had already taken place. However, one aspect that might indicate negative job crafting by the pro-players was poor communication, which could be based on Bakker and Demerouti’s (2017) own example. They describe how poor communication with colleagues can create higher work demands and more strain. Instances of poor communication between teammates were brought up by pro-players from both teams. One player (specifically in the category “Hardship in team”), explained how an argument among the teammates led him to lose focus and not wanting to play the game. This in turn could possibly be understood as him and his teammates creating higher demands in their job. Not only are they playing under higher demands, but now they are required to play even when they are on bad terms with each other. They also share fewer common resources such as social support and helpful communication. Perhaps the same importance can be attributed to communication even when it comes to positive job crafting. There were some pro-players who showed the ability to communicate what they wanted and needed to their colleagues, which might be a behavior prompted by motivation. For example, in one pro player told his teammates and coaching staff what he specifically wanted to focus on during their boot camp, making his motivation for improvement known and consequentially making more resources available from his coaching staff and teammates (specifically, in the category “Keeping on top of the game”).

The results related to previous research

In terms of relating the findings of this research to existing research, there are both similarities and differences. For example, Jones, Mahoney and Gucciardi (2014) applied the JD-R theory to professional rugby players to assess their perceived resources and demands. The authors identified intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, experience and social support in terms of resources. This is line with the results from this study were both external and internal motivators as well as social support were reasoned to be resources. Furthermore, high demands and injury were work demands identified by rugby players that also were mentioned by the pro-players. For example, they described situations where they were playing even if feeling sick or experiencing physical injury (as exemplified in the specific categories of “Have to play” and “Being pro is demanding”).

The aspects of constantly improving, motivation, communicating, dealing with emotions and adapting efficiently found in the psychosocial work environment for the pro-players were in line with the findings of Himmelstein, Liu and Shapiro (2017). Himmelstein, Liu and Shapiro (2017) also brought up the perceived difficulty experienced specifically by League of Legends players to balance life and gaming. Even though the population researched by these authors did not consist of pro-players by definition, this difficulty was also indicated by the pro-players. Personal sacrifices were considered a demand by many of the players in this research, which meant, for example, forsaking personal relationships for the sake of their profession. These sacrifice also seems encouraged by the organizations themselves and the e-
Sport scene in general, since it’s required by the players to, for example, live at the gaming house and play well over eight hours a day to “stay relevant”. When talking about these sacrifices, the pro-players in general seem to deem it as a necessary means to an end, and accepting these terms since it’s required of them. This is different from what Jones, Mahoney and Gucciardi (2014), who applied the JD-R theory on rugby players transitioning to pro’s in Australia, found in their research. Even though the experience of personal sacrifices also were evident in the rugby players, the players themselves voiced up against it, verbalizing that balance was important in their life and in order for them to do their job well. Therefore, supporting and enabling them to balance work, mental health and social relationships were deemed beneficial and important. Because of this, the approach towards strain and sacrifices as well as general attitudes toward it seem different between the e-sport pro-players and pro-rugby players, whereas the first category accepts it more and the second challenges it.

Communication in general was an aspect that was mentioned by the pro-players from both teams in the docu-series, especially by the players from team B (These aspects of communication were seen in the category “Requirements of teamwork” and the lower theme “Being part of an e-sports team”). In the results of this research, communication was mentioned as a means to interpersonally convey emotions, create and uphold social relationships and giving feedback on game play with the purpose of improving themselves and their team. Therefore, communication could be argued as important to the pro-players when executing their work as well as being part of the social network within the team. In this sense, the results of this study, which indicate the vital role that communication plays, is supported by previous research. For example, the study by Ji Kim et al. (2017) regarding collective intelligence in League of Legends teams indicated the importance of having emotional and interpersonal communication as well as teamwork. This research’s findings are similar to those of Kahn and Williams (2016), who concluded that communicating well, being understood and knowing each other well in a team creates the possibility of accessing and using a cognitive interdependent memory system, which increases the team performance. The conclusion from this study and the two previously mentioned is that working well together with the team, effective communication between team members, and getting along are important for pro-players. Ji Kim et al. (2017) also found, in contrast with previous research conducted in a different context, that there was no relationship between collective intelligence and fluent communication, indicating that one way communication and hierarchy are beneficial in League of Legends teams. Similar indications were found in this research, where some of the players brought up different aspects of communication such as who should “shotcall” at what time. The general sentiment was that communication between members was important, but when it comes to making fast and precise decisions, it was voiced as important to have “rules” to who should and should not shotcall at specific times.

Discussion

This study had as its main aim to explore how the psychosocial work environment is described by pro-players in existing documentary interview data and to investigate if these experiences could be understood by using a theoretical perspective. Two research questions were investigated, the first one being what different aspects of psychosocial work environment were mentioned by the pro-players in documentary interviews. The psychosocial work environment was demonstrated in the categories, lower- and higher themes presented in the results. The higher theme “Working as a pro-player – the profession” described different aspects of the psychosocial work environment of pro-players. In the pro-players’ line of work, there are both positive and negative aspects which balance each other. For example, high salary,
being part of a team or developing a sense of identity from their field of work, balance negative aspects such as receiving hate, having to make sacrifices and working exceedingly hard. The demands and resources stems from the overall work situation of the pro-players and their work requirements. It is also indicated in the results that positive aspects or negative aspects could be perceived differently by different pro-players, since some aspects were more prominent in one of the two teams, indicating that their respective work situations might be different.

If “Working as a pro-player, the profession” described the profession of being a pro-player, the experience of being a pro-player is depicted in the second higher theme, “The interdependent work – being a pro, a teammate and an individual”. The content of this theme indicated that experiences of being an individual, a professional player and a teammate overlap and influence each other interdependently. Different work related events bring on hardship in team, social support, emotions or pressure. This happens in a very high-pressure work environment. The game is ever changing, which leads to the constant need to change playstyle or strategies in order to keep up with the competition. Consequently, the pro-players and their team need to be able to change at an equally rapid rate in order to win.

The experience of high pressure situations in a fast paced work environment that has been presented in this thesis is supported by the results of Brook (2017), who claims that pro-players experience extreme work situations. Relating back to the findings presented by Brooks (2017), this could consequentially put pro-players at a higher risk of experiencing burnout if they regularly encounter highly stressful situations in their work environment.

The results of this study also depicted another kind of high pressure situation in the life of pro-players. Pro-players have to deal with the interdependent needs of being a pro, a teammate and an individual alongside the pressure to perform. As presented by the second theme “The interdependent work – being a pro, a teammate and an individual”, the psychosocial work environment is perceived by the pro players as a mixture of different aspects, which taken together are very demanding and require sacrifice in order to withstand them. This multifaceted work environment, which indicates that several aspects are present at the same time and overlap in the work life of a pro-player, also supports the notion that Faust, Meyer and Griffith (2013) put forward. Faust et al., (2013) proposed that the work situation of pro-players cannot be fully understood without contemplating a multitude of different aspects that includes individual-, team- and organizational perspectives. Furthermore, the findings of this study also portray a difficulty in separating these different layers when it comes to the pro-players, since they are closely entwined.

However, even though the work environment of the pro-players could be considered extreme and highly pressured, the results of this study also depict the experience of positive aspects and high rewards connected to this profession. These positive aspects make it worthwhile for the players and motivate them into trying exceedingly hard at perfecting their skills and delivering results. This finding could be related to Taylor’s (2012) research, which concluded that enjoyment of work, being part of a team and receiving a sense of accomplishment through work are strong influential positive factors in the work environment and work life of pro-players.

The second research question intended to investigate if these different aspects could be understood in relation to the theoretical JD-R model. Applying the theoretical framework to the results indicated that the different aspects mentioned could indeed be understood by applying the JD-R theory. Both formal and informal demands were mentioned in the documents, such as the formal demand to have certain work hours or the informal demand of fulfilling social roles in the team, for example. In terms of resources, formal perks such as being able to travel for the purposes of the job and receiving a high salary were discussed alongside informal resources such as developing a sense of identity or receiving support from teammates.
Processes of motivation and strain were also identifiable through the application of the JD-R theory. Based on this, the answer to the second research question would be affirmative. The different aspects mentioned by the pro-players could be analyzed by applying the JD-R theory, indicating that a theoretical approach could be applied to researching documentary interview data on pro-players in future research. Even so, before using this data for research, careful consideration needs to be made concerning the aim of the research as well as the method of analysis. This is true because pre-existing data is limited in the sense that the researchers cannot control or direct the data. Based on this, this data could be considered suitable when trying to retrospectively understand or to explore different aspects of the psychosocial work environment of pro-players, as well as the context and the culture in which pro-players are working in a more general sense.

In regard to further research, the results from this study showed that good communication and teamwork were important aspects in the work of pro players, which was supported by previous research by Ji Kim e.t al (2017) as well as Kahn and Williams (2016). Undoubtedly, communication and teamwork are important factors when competing in a team. The question still remains why this is? The players described communicational aspects in team atmosphere, emotions, friendships, arguments, constructive feedback or in-game shot-calling. Relating to the interdependent work of being a pro, a teammate and an individual it’s evident that communication is a central aspect of conveying experiences of the interdependent work. In this research, requirements of teamwork and being part of an e-sport team both contained aspects of communicating and getting along together and portrayed demands, resources, motivation and strain. Based on this, perhaps it is quite natural that a central issue in a team working and living so intensely and closely together is how they interact with each other as well as the quality of that interaction. Hence, it could be of interest to further research what exactly is communicated between players in relationship to their psychosocial work environment and how it is communicated. It could also be fruitful to investigate what promotes teamwork and communication in an e-sport team context. Since fluent communication does not contribute to collective intelligence in League of Legends teams as it does in most other instances (Ji Kim et al., 2017), there might be some differences in how teamwork and collective intelligence is developed in the case of e-sport. Further research with the focus on communication in e-sport teams from a group perspective could consequentially contribute to knowledge that could be implemented by teams and their organization, making it directly relevant for the “field” as well.

It can be argued that, even though similarities were found between traditional athletes and e-sport professionals in terms of the perceived psychosocial work environment, as indicated by the shared perceptions of demands and resources, there are also some differences. For example, the rugby players viewed balance between work, mental health and social relationships as important in order to feel good and perform well in their work (Jones, Mahoney & Gucciardi, 2014). This differentiates “traditional” sport from “e-sports”. It seems more difficult to maintain a somewhat balanced life outside of the work as a pro-player in e-sports compared to what is the case for rugby athletes or perhaps even athletes in general. The working hours of pro-players, which often far exceed the customary eight hours a day, in combination with the fact that they live together in a gaming house with teammates and staff, can create some difficulties in maintaining a personal sphere and life separate from their work. Maybe the need to be fast in adapting to a game that is constantly changing at a very fast rate is part of the explanation to this intense work situation. Given this and by taking the JD-R theory into account, the pro-players of e-sports might be at higher risk of experiencing strain since the possibility for maintaining and cultivating personal resources is very limited. This could in turn
lead to pro-players of e-sports being more prone to getting burned out in comparison to traditional athletes. Considering some of the results of this research, for example the interdependent work that is being a pro, a teammate and an individual at the same time as well as dealing with a team and its environment and social codes, strong and fast changing emotions, pressure and motivation might create heavy demands on the pro-players. Based on this, one implication of this research is that the players themselves and their organizations might benefit from adjusting the work environment to allow and promote for other personal resources to exist and thrive alongside the players’ work. Based on the results from this research it is not self-evident how this could be implemented while still adhering to the e-sport industry and its inherent working conditions. Another suggestion for future research is therefore to better understand the e-sport industry and inquire about changes that the pro-players themselves might desire in order to create a better psychosocial work environment. This could contribute to a work environment where the players have better resources to help balance the demands of their profession, thus enabling them to experience motivation and thrive in their profession both in terms of performance and overall wellbeing.

Limitations

This study employed already collected data in the form of documentary interviews which motivates some considerations in regard to its limitations. For one, there was no possibility to use follow-up questions to clarify or further investigate certain aspects. Some measures were taken to lessen the potential impact of this, for example the research questions were made broad to be able to capture a bigger spectrum of experiences and the JD-R model was chosen as the theoretical framework because it is a well-established theory of psychosocial working environment, applicable to many contexts. Even though some precautions were taken, the limited possibility to prevent misunderstandings or to ask for clarifications might have resulted in the misinterpretation of some of the statements made by the pro-players in the analysis of the content. To lessen the impact of this, this study has tried to base its results on many quotes by different players. Although, because of the design of the docu-series, where the players were not asked the same questions or interviewed on the same topic, a precise representation of pro-players attitude towards different perspectives might be difficult to estimate. Because of the pre-collected nature of the data, this research also had a limited ability to gather data towards certain aspects. For example, the interviews were not directed by an interview guide developed with the current research questions in mind. Thus, there were limited possibilities when applying the JD-R theory to hone in on certain aspects of the model, making the theoretical application broader and less specific in a sense. The sample of 10 pro players could also be considered small. Besides, the e-sport that was investigated, League of Legends, has both differences and similarities with other e-sports. Taken together, the results of this study should be considered with these limitations in mind, making reservations as to the extent to which the results can be generalized. Because of these limitations, it would be beneficial to conduct future research with other methods that allow for more control when collecting the data from the pro-players, for example surveys or individual interviews. This could allow for a more precise and deeper knowledge on certain areas of importance relating to pro-players, their team and their organization, and, not to forget, the research area of e-sport as a whole.
References


Appendix 1

Letter to the organizations (e-sport teams)

Hi

My name is Josefine Jonsson and I’m a psychology student at Umeå University, Sweden. I’m currently writing my master thesis and that’s why I’m contacting you.

As I’m sure you are aware of, e-sports is a fast growing industry. However at this point in time, there’s still sparse research in the field. The research that exist often does not include the voice or perspectives of the pro-players themselves which is problematic since they are on the frontline of the industry. Therefore, gaining a broader understanding of pro-players psycho-social work environment might provide knowledge in this area that could benefit the future research on e-sports, the pro-players, their team, their organisations and the industry as a whole. One accessible outlet where the featuring pro-players is the docu-series your team produced. I’m contacting you to inform you that I’m using your available YouTube content, the (xxx) series, for my research and I’d therefore like to invite you to take part of the results from this research once it’s finished.

The aim of the thesis is to explore the psycho-social factors related to the pro-gaming profession by investigating: How is the psycho-social work environment described by the pro-players (based on your docu-series) and could these experiences be understood using a theoretical perspective by applying a psycho-social organisation theory?

To protect the privacy of your organisation and players as far as possible under these circumstances, your organisation name as well as the players’ names or gamer tags will be altered in the thesis unless you request otherwise.

If you are interested in taking part of the results once the research is finished, or if you wish to ask any questions related to this research project, please contact me by mail on josefine.j@hotmail.se

Best regards
Josefine Jonsson
Student at the department of psychology
Umeå University
Appendix 2.

Below, two flow charts are presented to illustrate the higher themes respectively and their connecting lower themes and categories.

Figure 1. A flow chart overlooking the higher theme “Working as a pro-player – the profession” and its respective lower themes and categories.

Figure 2. A flow chart overlooking the higher theme “The interdependent work – being a pro, a teammate and an individual and its respective lower themes and categories.