

# The Antinomies of Autonomy for IT Workers in Ireland and Denmark

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# Changing Work, Changing Autonomy

- Psychosocial risk profile (Eurofound 2015, WHO 2010)
- Autonomy Paradox (van Echtelt et al. 2006)
- Project Time (Shih 2004)
- Time Work (Moen et al. 2013)
- Unpredictability of knowledge work (O'Carroll 2015)
- Reinforcing Gender Roles (Lott and Chung 2016)
- Stress of higher status (Schieman et al. 2006)
- Overload of requirements (Warr 2007 Vitamin Model)
- Boundarylessness (Allvin 2008)
- De-synchronised rhythms (Lund et al. 2011) and low associational control (Hvid et al. 2010)

# Research Aims

Explore the practices and social structures of similarly autonomous working lives across different contexts.

## **Puzzle**

How the ecology & psychology (Schwartz 2005) of high autonomy shape the stressors of working life.

## **Objectives**

- Unpack constituents and consequences of high work autonomy.
- How demands and strategies are shaped by their context?
- How these dynamics translate into stressors?

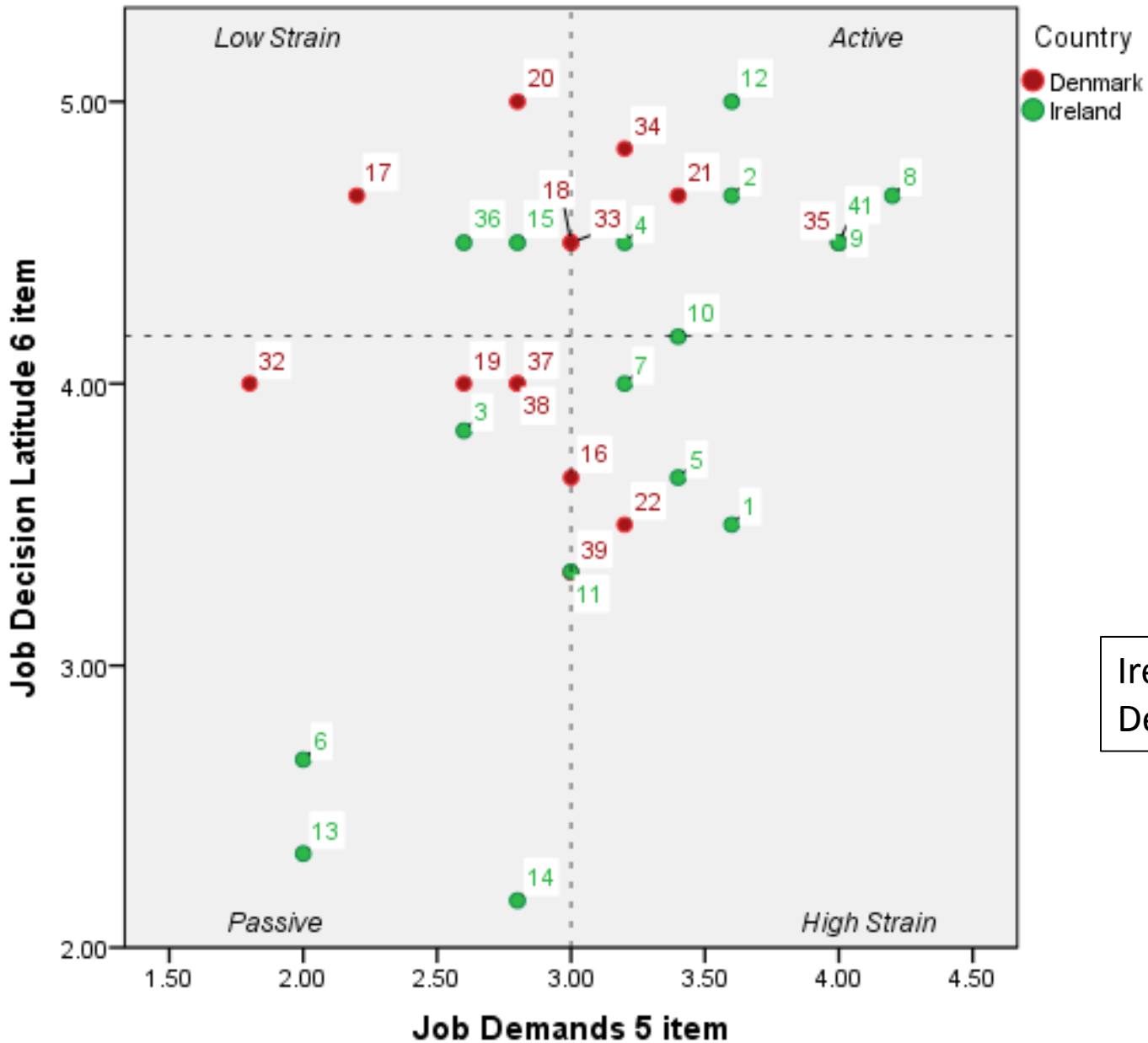
## **Analytical Framework**

Links capabilities & stressors of working life via 4 “R’s”: rules, requirements, responsibilities, and resources.

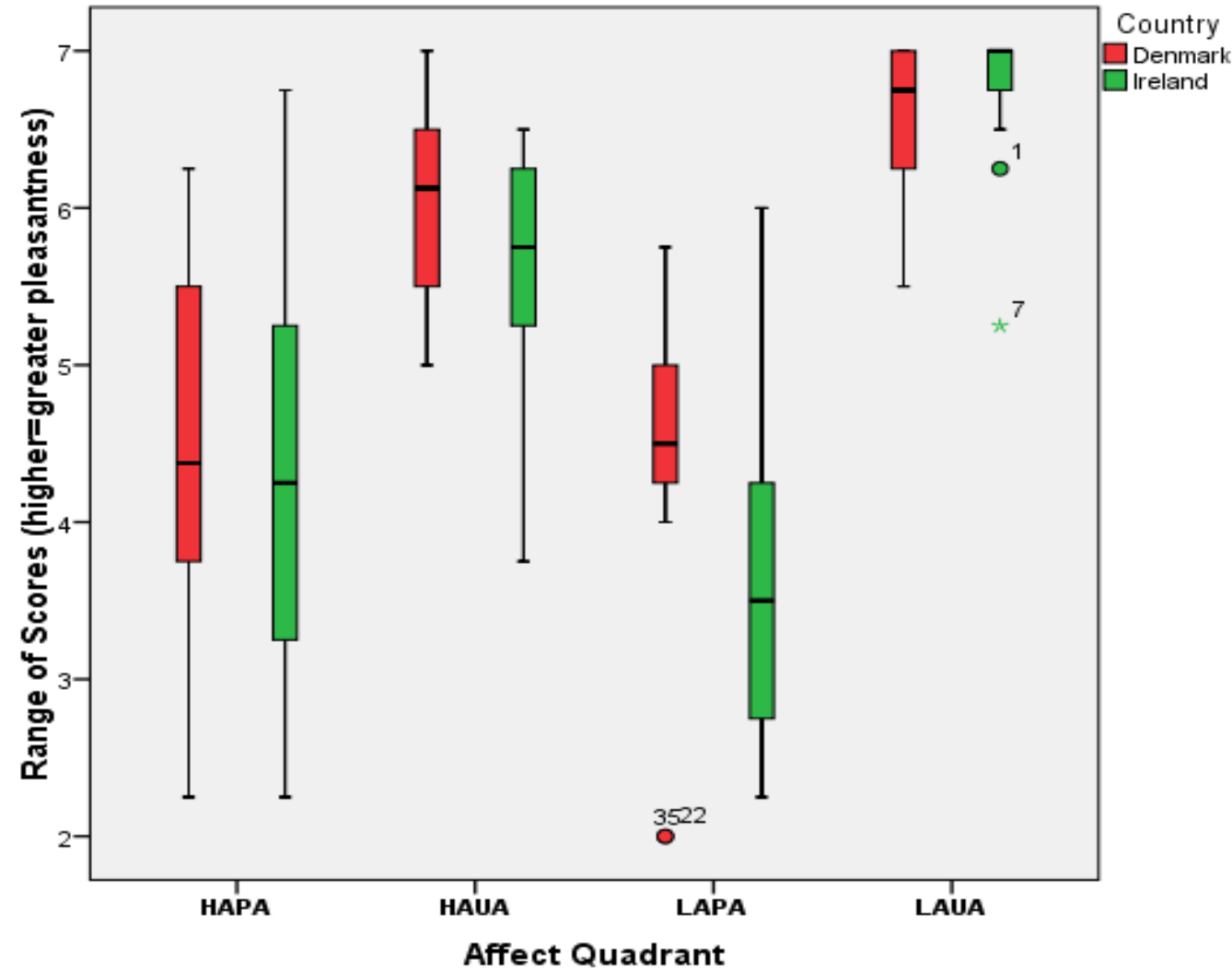
# Methods

- Semi-structured interviews with IT workers in Ireland (n=17) and Denmark (n=14).
- Similar blocks of IT work and role autonomy
- 4 Elements of Research Instrument:
  1. Career & Employment History Grid
  2. Psychosocial Work Environment (PWE) Survey
  3. Job-related feelings Survey (Warr et al. 2014)
  4. Topic-Guide framed by PI bargains: effort (work-pay), boundaries (work-time), employment/career (pay-time)

Figure??: Participant D-C Model 6\*5



# Work-related Feelings: Warr et al. 2014 Frame



## HAPA

excited, enthusiastic,  
inspired, joyful

## HAUA

anxious, tense,  
worried, nervous

## LAPA

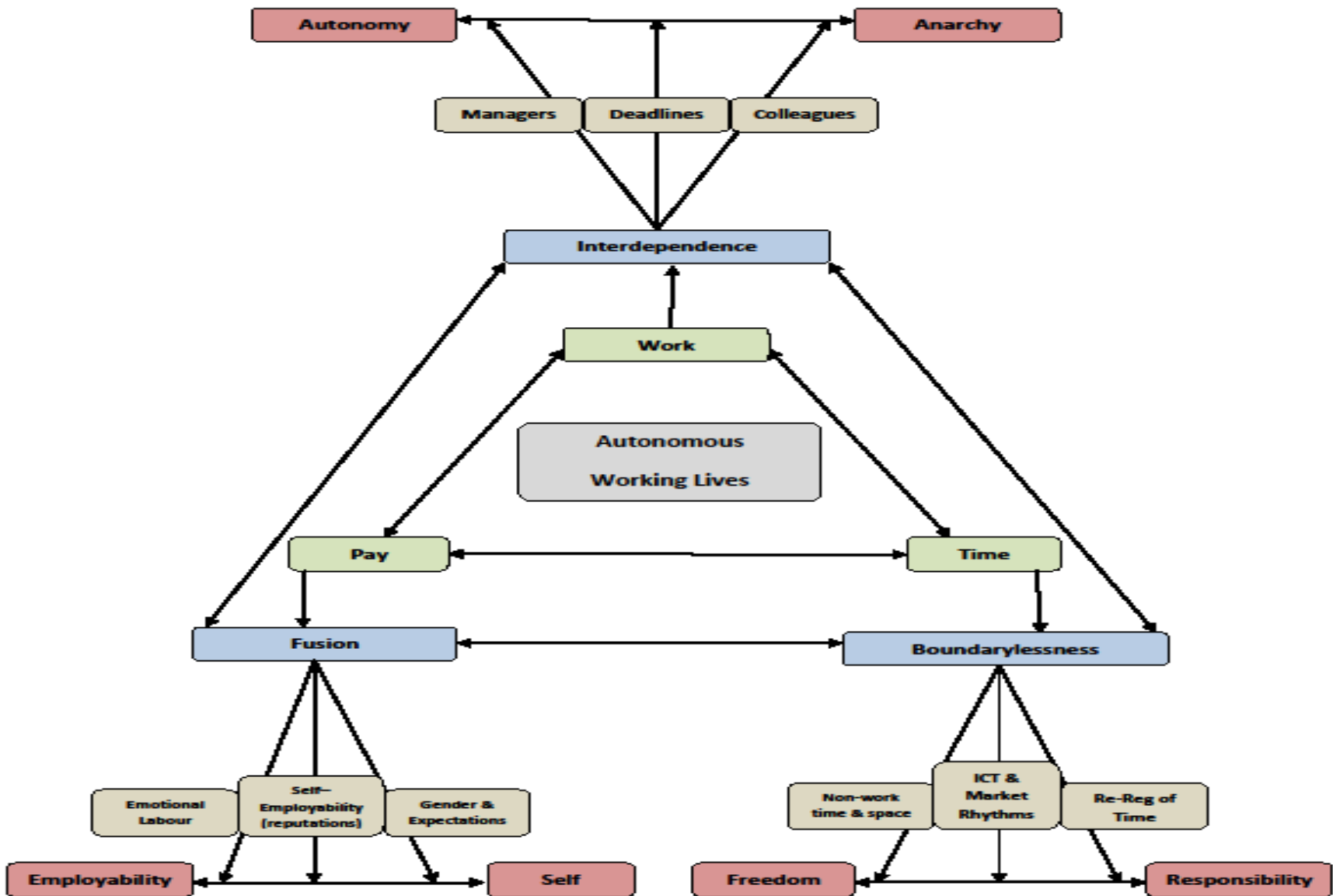
relaxed, calm, at  
ease, laid back

## LAUA

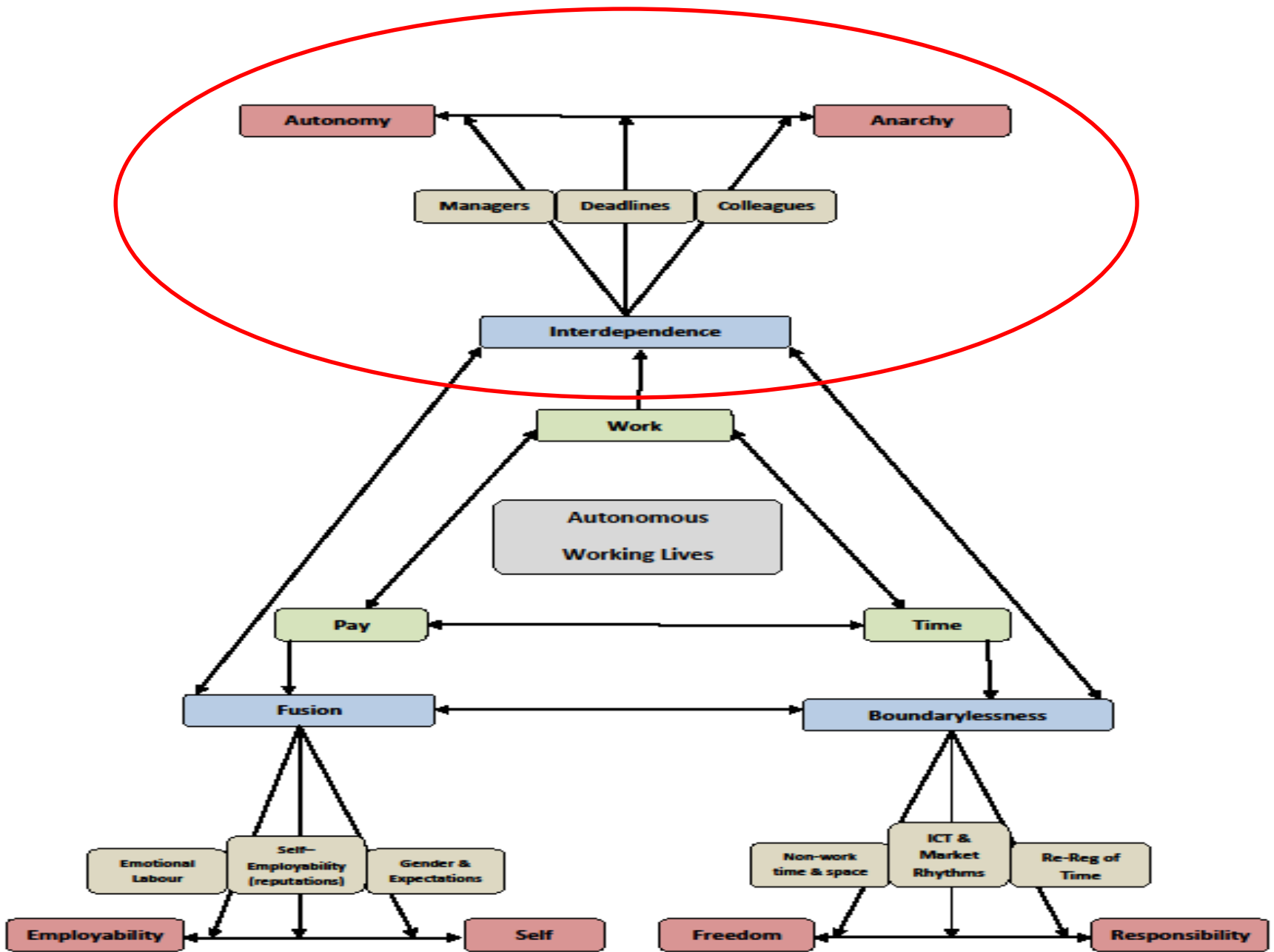
depressed, dejected,  
despondent,  
hopeless

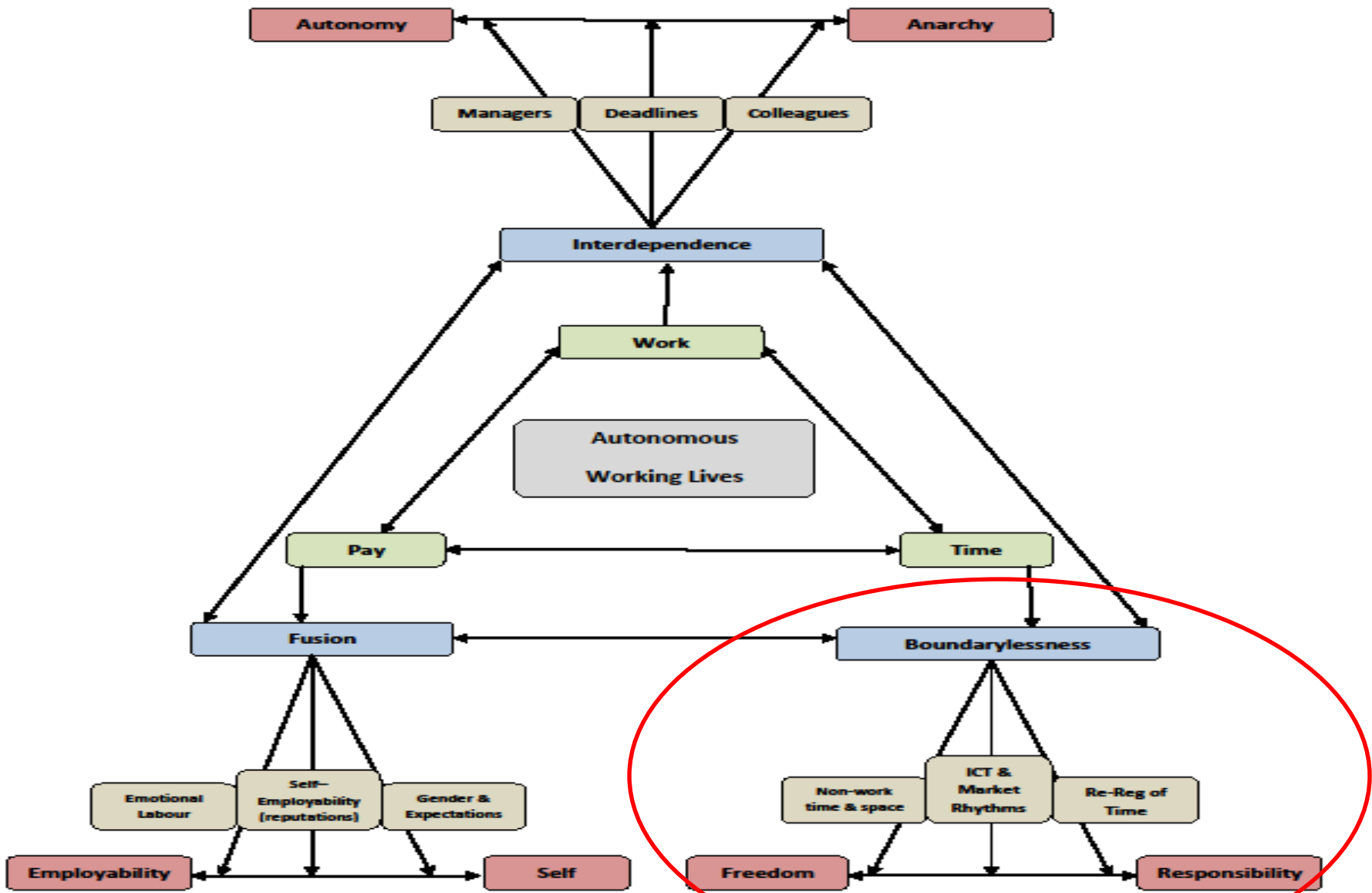
# Qualitative Findings

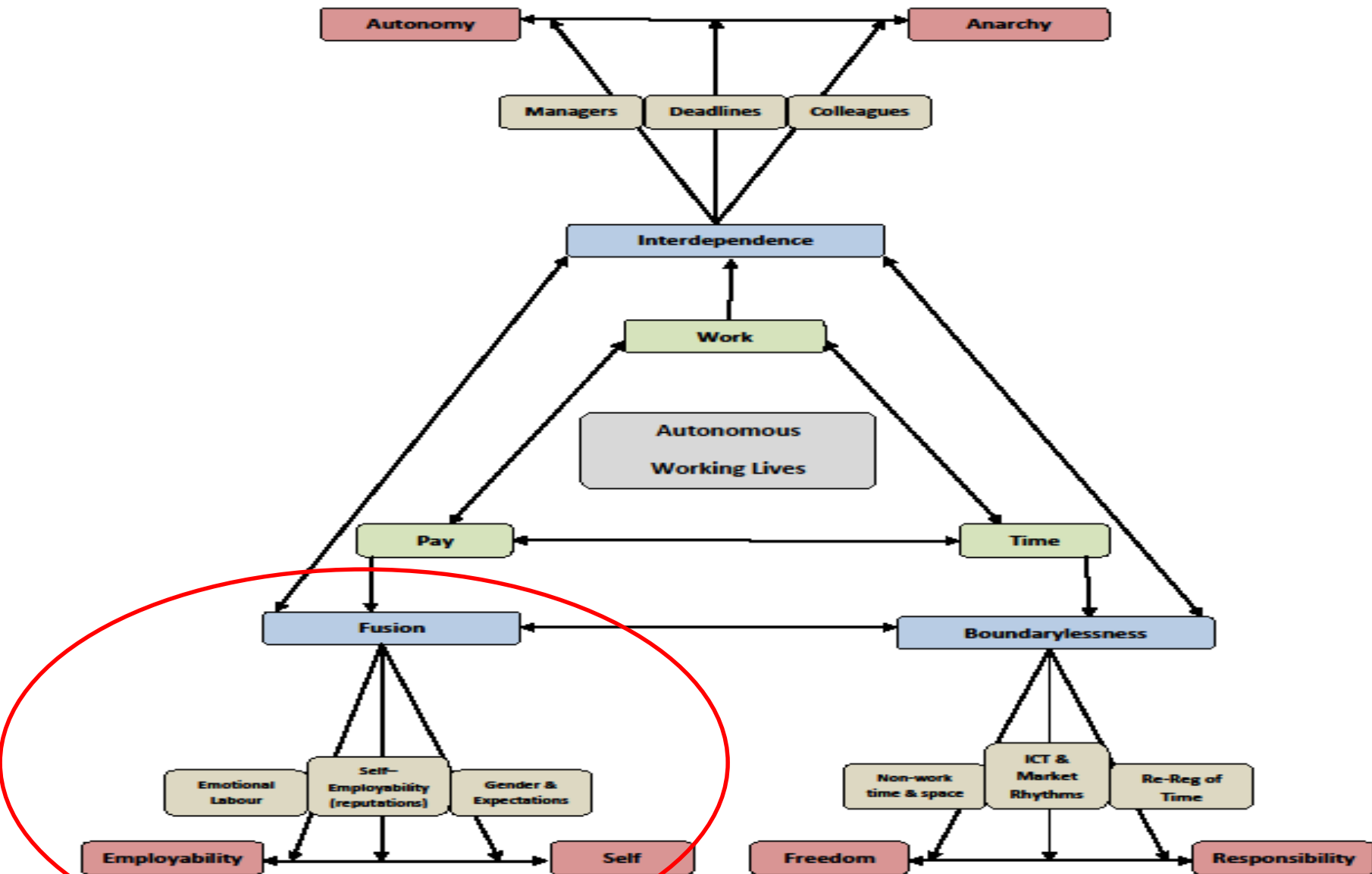
- Antinomies: conditions which challenge or reduce a worker's sense of discretion, freedom, and self-regulation.
- 3 Key Negotiations of IT workers:
  1. Between Autonomy and Anarchy (labour process).
  2. Between Freedom and Responsibility (working conditions).
  3. Between Employability and the Self (employment).
- Similar antinomies, but different repertoire of capabilities and experience of stressors.











# Thanks!

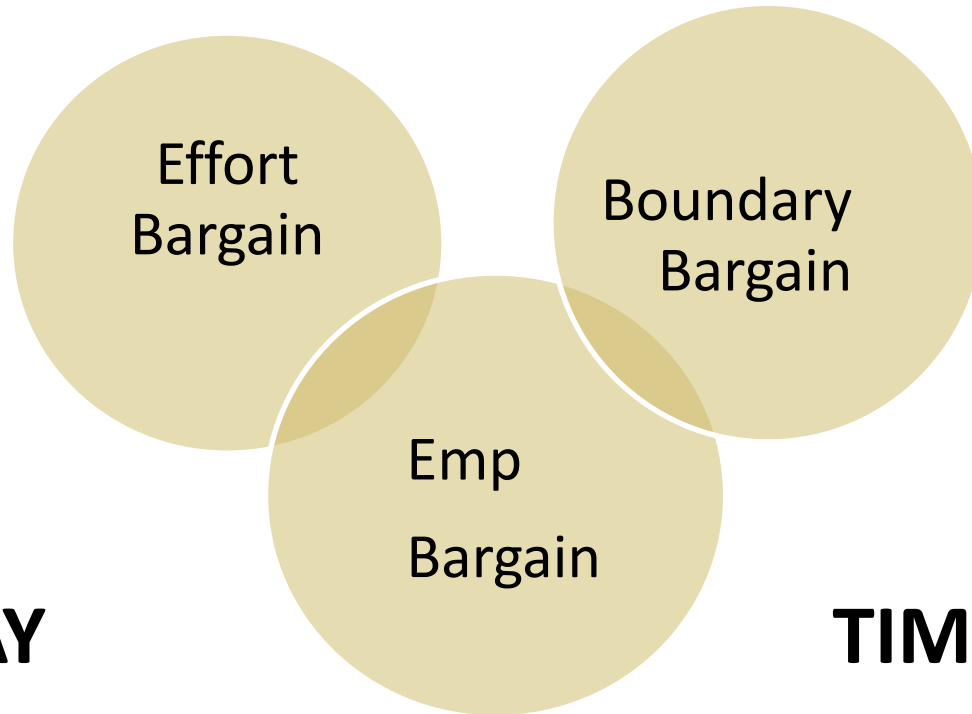
[johnpaul.byrne@nuim.ie](mailto:johnpaul.byrne@nuim.ie)



**EXTRA SLIDES**

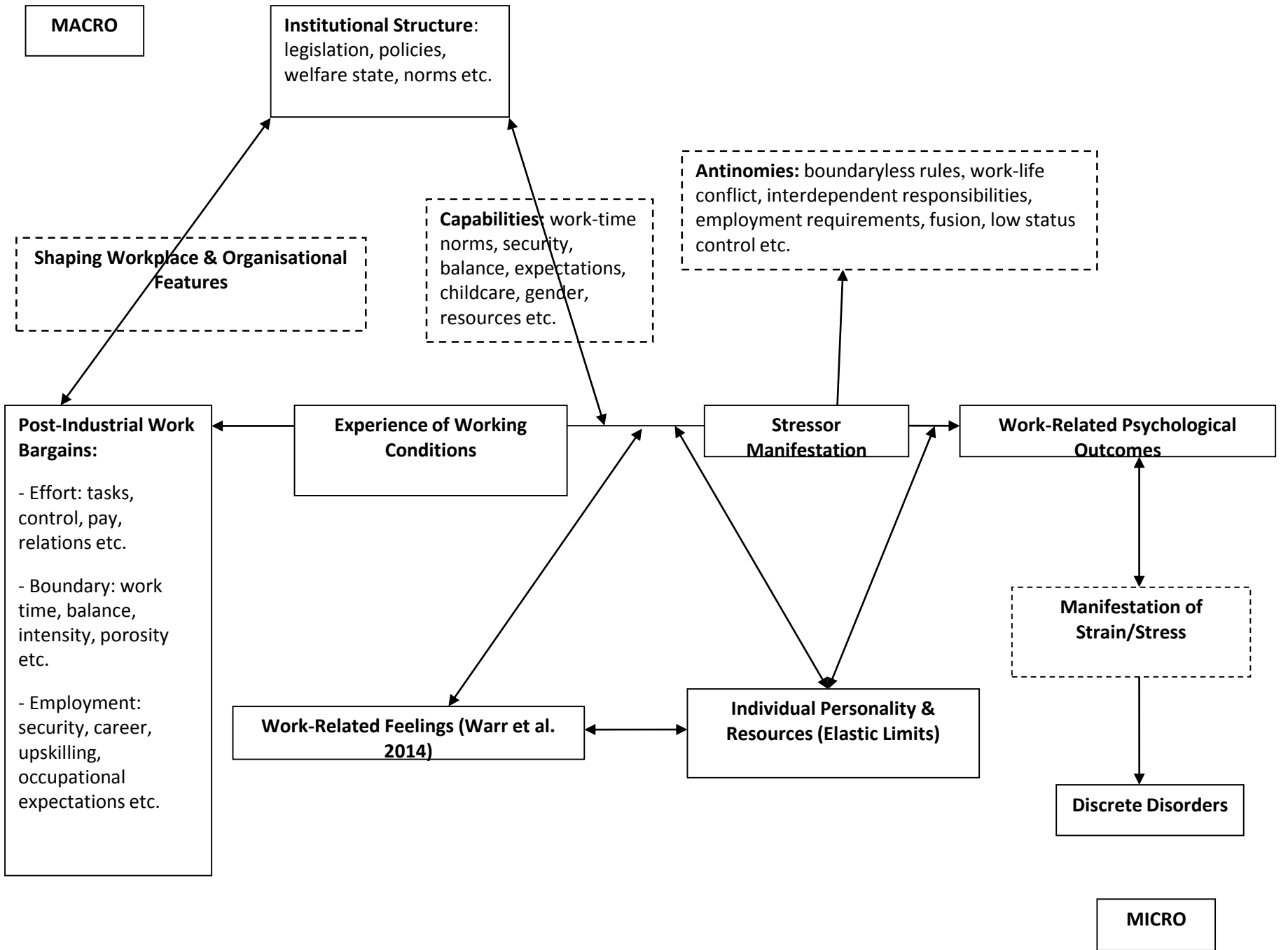
# PI Workplace Bargains

**WORK**



**PAY**

**TIME**



# Participant Positions

Denmark	Ireland
Tech Lead	Senior Compliance Office
Chief Tech Officer/Architect (2)	Head of IT
Modernisation Specialist	Consultant (4)
Software Developer (3)	Chief Information Officer
Chief Financial Officer (CFO)	Technical Trainer
IT/System Consultant (3)	Senior Tech Writer (2)
IT Project Manager	Software Developer
Senior Developer/Advisor (2)	Project Manager (2)
	Editor
	CEO/VP (2)
	Head of Professional Services



# Participant Profile

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	Total (n=31)	Denmark (n=14)	Ireland (n=17)
<b>Age (mean)</b>	48	49	48
<b>Women (%)</b>	23%	14%	29%
<b>Children (% Yes)</b>	81%	79%	82%
<b>Third Level Qual. (%)</b>	74%	50%	94%
<b>Post Grad Qual (%)</b>	35%	7%	59%

# Job-Related Affect Quadrant Means

JOB-RELATED FEELINGS (N=31)								
	HAPA		HAUA		LAPA		LAUA	
Mean	4.35		5.82		3.97		6.65	
Minimum	2.25		3.75		3		5.25	
Maximum	6.75		7		6		7	
	DK	IE	DK	IE	DK	IE	DK	IE
Mean	4.55	4.18	6.07	5.62	4.34	3.67	6.55	6.73
Minimum	2.25	2.25	5	3.75	2	2.25	5.5	5.25
Maximum	6.25	6.75	7	6.5	5.75	6	7	7

**HAPA** [excited, enthusiastic, inspired, joyful]

**HAUA** [anxious, tense, worried, nervous]

**LAPA** [relaxed, calm, at ease, laid back]

**LAUA** [depressed, dejected, despondent, hopeless]

Pleasant Scoring (1: Never...7: Always), Unpleasant Scoring (7:Never...1: Always)

## D-C Quads 6\*5 Version by Job-Related Affect Quadrants

	HAPA	HAUA	LAPA	LAUA
<b>PASSIVE (n=8)</b>				
Mean	<b>3.84</b>	6.06	4.65	6.7
Minimum	2.25	5.5	3.25	5.5
Maximum	5.25	6.5	6	7
<b>LOW STRAIN (n=4)</b>				
Mean	5.12	6.19	4.31	6.9
Minimum	4	5.75	3.75	6.75
Maximum	6.75	6.5	5.25	7
<b>ACTIVE (n=11)</b>				
Mean	4.77	5.81	<b>3.69</b>	6.69
Minimum	3.25	3.75	2	6
Maximum	6.25	6.75	5.75	7
<b>HIGH STRAIN (n=8)</b>				
Mean	<b>3.88</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>6.47</b>
Minimum	2.25	4.25	2	5.25
Maximum	6.25	7	5.5	7

## D-C Quads & Affect Quadrants by Country Mean

	HAPA		HAUA		LAPA		LAUA	
	DK	IE	DK	IE	DK	IE	DK	IE
<b>PASSIVE</b>								
Mean	<b>3.81</b>	<b>3.87</b>	5.94	6.19	4.62	4.69	6.37	6.94
<b>LOW STRAIN</b>								
Mean	<b>4.87</b>	<b>5.37</b>	6.25	6.12	4.62	4	7	6.87
<b>ACTIVE</b>								
Mean	<b>4.9</b>	<b>4.67</b>	6.25	5.46	4.2	<b>3.25</b>	6.5	6.83
<b>HIGH STRAIN</b>								
Mean	<b>4.75</b>	<b>3.35</b>	5.83	5.15	4	<b>3.2</b>	6.58	6.4