



# Navigating Organisational Restructuring and Job Transitions

A Case Study of Workers in the Swedish Hotel Sector



Elin Storman

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Working Life Science

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*Till min älskade familj*

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## List of original research papers

### **Paper I**

Rydell, A., & Storman, E. (2023). Short-time Work, Redundancies, and Changing Work Environment: The Hospitality Sector During COVID-19. *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 13, 97-117.

### **Paper II**

Storman, E., Thulemark, M. & Cassel, S. H. (2025). Work Identities and Changed Work Roles in Times of Crises: A Study of Hospitality Workers During Restructuring. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 25(2), 188–204.

### **Paper III**

Storman, E. & Rydell, A. (2025). Job Loss and Underemployment: A Qualitative Study from the Swedish Hotel Sector. *Labour and Industry*, 35(3), 277-298.

### **Paper IV**

Storman, E. Worker Perspectives on Job Mobility After Job Loss Through the Lens of Lock-in. (Manuscript, not submitted).

This thesis is a compilation thesis which builds on four empirical papers. Reprints were made with permission from the respective publishers, and all papers are published with open access.

## **Contributions to the empirical papers**

**Paper I:** Shared authorship. I conducted the majority of the data collection while the analysis, design of paper and writing were carried out in collaboration with my co-author.

**Paper II:** Main author. I conducted the majority of the data collection, performed the analysis, designed and wrote the paper with input from my co-authors.

**Paper III:** Main author. I conducted the majority of the data collection, performed the analysis, designed and wrote the paper with input from my co-author.

**Paper IV:** Sole author. I conducted the majority of the data collection, performed the analysis, designed and wrote the paper.

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## Abstract

This thesis examines hotel worker's experiences of organisational restructuring and job transitions during the COVID-19 pandemic. It draws on four empirical papers based on 45 semi-structured interviews conducted in a constrained labour market shaped by fluctuating demand, pandemic restrictions, organisational restructuring and extensive use of short-time work (STW).

The analysis captures insights from hotel workers across multiple post-restructuring labour market statuses, illustrating job transitions across internal and external labour markets as well as the liminal space in between. Two papers focus on workers who remained in employment and includes experiences of extensive STW, while the other two examine workers who faced job loss. Across all groups, restructuring brought substantial changes to work and employment conditions: remaining workers faced fluctuating workloads, hours and income, as well as changed roles and reduced career prospects; redundant workers, on the other hand, often entered underemployment and faced constrained mobility, although some saw chances for a new career.

The thesis examines outcomes for workers by integrating theories of internal and external labour markets, restructuring strategies, job transitions, and established restructuring outcomes categories: *Victims*, *Endurers* and *Survivors*. To capture experiences overlooked within existing frameworks a fourth category, *Liminals*, is introduced. To analyse these transitions, the thesis develops the Job Transition Model, a visual and analytical model grounded in theoretical and empirical insights from this thesis, applied here to understand job transitions in the context of organisational restructuring involving extensive STW implementation.

Overall, the thesis offers a more nuanced understanding of restructuring involving STW, demonstrating the interconnected nature of internal and external labour markets, and the complex transitions workers navigate during organisational restructuring.

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Ett kapitel är nu slut. Och jag välkomnar nästa med öppna armar.  
BRING IT ON!

## 1. Introduction

*What the hell am I going to do now? My sector is completely gone.*

This quote from Rose-Mary, a hotel worker interviewed in this study, captures the initial sense of disorientation and vulnerability shared by many hotel workers who faced involuntary changes in their work situations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis brought sudden and far-reaching changes in the labour market, and has been described as a ‘labour market earthquake’ (Eurofound, 2020) with significant impact on work life, working conditions and unemployment levels (Gupta & Dhar, 2024).

This thesis focuses on hotel workers who experienced involuntary job transitions during the pandemic, examining how they navigated organisational restructuring and the broader labour market. Among them are Rose-Mary, in her early thirties and living in a mid-sized city, who had planned for a long-term career in the sector; and Andreas, in his fifties and living in a small town, who has held various roles within the hotel and restaurant sector throughout his working life but now faced an abrupt change in his career: *It was so strange, after 18 years, to leave, and not in the way you thought it would end. You just had to go.* Both workers were made redundant during the pandemic, though with different notice periods, and subsequently navigated multiple dimensions of the labour market. We return to these voices in the discussion, where their experiences are used to illustrate the analysis of job transitions.

Unlike previous studies on the consequences of organisational restructuring (cf. Bui et al., 2019; McLachlan et al., 2021), these changes unfolded in parallel with the extensive use of short-time work (STW) schemes, implemented in this form for the first time in Sweden (Swedish National Mediation Office, 2020). While the experiences of workers form the core of this thesis, STW shaped the conditions in which organisational restructuring occurred. STW schemes are designed to preserve employment during economic downturns by allowing organisations to reduce working hours while the state compensates workers for lost income (Eurofound, 2021). These schemes have been widely

used across Europe (Müller et al., 2022) and have been shown to mitigate job losses (cf. Balleer et al., 2016; Cahuc & Carcillo, 2011). However, most research on STW centres on aggregated outcomes such as employment levels, GDP impact and policy efficiency (cf. Cahuc & Carcillo, 2011; Giupponi et al., 2022; Hijzen & Venn, 2011) or cross-country policy comparisons (Ahlstrand et al., 2025; Hijzen & Martin, 2013). While these studies are valuable for assessing overall effectiveness, they reveal little about how workers experience these measures, whether directly impacted through reduced working hours or indirectly through job loss and transitions in the labour market shaped by crisis conditions (cf. Cahuc, 2024).

Shifting the analytical lens from organisations and macro-level outcomes to workers' experiences, this thesis situates workers within a wider system: the labour market and the restructuring landscape workers navigated. Understanding this landscape requires starting from workers' pre-restructuring positions in the internal labour market and then extending beyond organisational boundaries to include the external labour market and the liminal space which, as argued in the thesis, lies between them. These dimensions are conceptualised in the Job Transition Model developed throughout the thesis.

The model is grounded in internal labour market theory, drawing on classic and contemporary contributions to understanding internal and external labour markets (cf. Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Lee, 2015; MacKenzie & McLachlan, 2023; Wallo et al., 2016). It also incorporates the liminal space in between, containing liminal labour market positions which blur the organisational boundary such as underemployment (Beck et al., 2025; Feldman, 1996), job churning (Worth, 2005) and permanent temporariness (Gonäs & Westin, 1993). In addition, the model engages with organisational restructuring theories, including theoretical perspectives on restructuring strategies and STW implementation (Cahuc, 2024; Johnstone, 2023) and how these connect to post-restructuring job transitions (MacKenzie et al., 2025) and restructuring outcomes theories (Devine et al., 2003) commonly categorised as *Victims* (Bennett et al., 1995), *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021) and *Survivors* (Brockner et al., 1987). The thesis also contributes by introducing a fourth theoretical category of worker outcomes: *Liminals*.

Together, these debates form the core scholarly context with which this thesis engages and by which it offers theoretical contribution.

Organisational restructuring may include a combination of redundancies, work reorganisation and, potentially, policy utilisation related to restructuring (cf. McLachlan et al., 2022). As STW schemes are intended to influence organisational behaviours, especially by discouraging redundancies, it is plausible that STW implementation may also shape broader restructuring strategies. This raises questions about potential unintended consequences; particularly their impact on workers' experiences and transitions, an area which generally remains underexplored within restructuring research (MacKenzie et al., 2025; Mussagulova et al., 2023).

Historically, restructuring research has focused on redundant workers in the male-dominated manufacturing sector (Cederlöf, 2024; Dobbins et al., 2013; Gonäs et al., 2006; Gonäs & Westin, 1993; MacKenzie et al., 2025). This focus is echoed in STW-related research, as the manufacturing sector was a major user of STW during the 2008-2009 financial crisis particularly across Europe (Hijzen & Venn, 2011). Furthermore, the Swedish STW system has been developed based on lessons from that crisis (Ahlstrand et al., 2025). During the pandemic, however, STW was used across a broader range of sectors, raising questions about whether policies and insight derived from manufacturing-based experiences can unproblematically be applied to other sectors. In Sweden, the hotel sector in particular responded swiftly and decisively, combining redundancies, work reorganisation, and the implementation of STW schemes (cf. Eurofound, 2020). This created a valuable opportunity to examine STW implementation in more precarious and service-oriented contexts such as the vulnerable employment situation of many hotel workers (Baum et al., 2020).

This focus further contributes to a critically understudied area: the intersection of work and tourism (Ladkin et al., 2023), where further research is needed, e.g., on job loss experiences (Chen & Chen, 2021), job search behaviour during the pandemic (Popa & Madera, 2023), and post-pandemic implications for tourism work (Baum & Hai, 2020; Ladkin et al., 2023) which all align with the focus of this thesis.

## **Aim and research questions**

The aim of this thesis is to examine hotel workers' experiences of organisational restructuring and job transitions. This includes workers with different restructuring outcomes, navigating the internal or the external labour market or the liminal space between them. The research was guided by the following research questions:

**RQ 1:** How did organisational restructuring during the pandemic affect the experiences of workers within the hotel sector?

**RQ 2:** What unintended consequences emerged from extensive implementation of STW schemes during organisational restructuring?

**RQ 3:** How do existing theoretical categories of restructuring outcomes reflect the experiences of workers in this study?

Through a qualitative, inductive case study based on in-depth interviews with hotel workers from five workplaces which underwent organisational restructuring involving both STW schemes and redundancies, this thesis captures workers' experiences across different transitional paths. The thesis integrates narratives from workers' transitions within the internal labour market but also captures the voices of workers who faced job loss, transitioned to the external labour market, and had to navigate their job search in a constrained labour market. Examining these dimensions together reveals overlapping consequences which extend across organisational boundaries and highlights the liminal space that exists in between them. It also shows how organisational restructuring involving STW implementation is experienced in practise, and how this shapes workers' experiences of transitioning between different labour market dimensions as conceptualised in the Job Transition Model.

## **Brief overview of the included papers**

The four research papers offer empirical insights and theoretical engagement with different dimensions of restructuring outcomes. Papers I and II focus on workers who remained employed and analyses their experience and adaption to new work conditions shaped by crisis responses. The results show significant shifts in working conditions, with

fluctuations over the pandemic waves caused by public health guidelines and STW implementation. These conditions contributed to prolonged restructuring processes which affected job security, workload, time and financial structures, and work relations [Paper I]. Moreover, the reorganisation led to flatter organisational structures, reduced career advancement opportunities, and shifted power dynamics towards a favouring of employers. These changes had implications for workers' identity, perceived job security, and turnover intentions [Paper II].

Papers III and IV explore the experiences of workers who faced involuntary job loss. Their transitions were challenging, often leading to underemployment in terms of hours and skill utilisation, within a constrained labour market shaped by organisational restructuring strategies affected by the implementation of STW schemes. Workers' strategies for navigating transition were shaped by their ability to utilise their skills, combined with their life and family situations [Paper III]. The findings also reveal a difference between objective and subjective perceptions of opportunities for job mobility, with barriers in the job search process complicating workers' transition to new employment [Paper IV].

Together, the papers and this thesis contribute to ongoing theoretical debates on restructuring outcomes for both retained and redundant workers (Bennett et al., 1995; Brockner et al., 1987; Devine et al., 2003; McLachlan et al., 2021). By addressing internal labour market dynamics alongside external transitions, the thesis highlights the interconnected nature of labour markets (Doeringer & Piore, 1971; MacKenzie & McLachlan, 2023; Williamson et al., 1975) and how the internal and external labour market overlap. Collectively, the papers illustrate the complex challenges workers face during organisational restructuring involving STW (Cahuc, 2024) and demonstrate how this shapes workers' experiences and navigation of changes in their work situation.

### **Organisation of thesis**

The remainder of this thesis is organised as follows. The next chapter reviews the literature, which informs the analysis and discussion of the findings, focusing on organisational restructuring and its consequences for workers, and how workers navigate involuntary change in

work situations. It also synthesises existing knowledge regarding STW implementation, and examines the internal and external labour markets and their interconnections. Chapter 3 provides the background and context for the thesis with a focus on the pandemic crisis and its impact on the hotel sector. Chapter 4 outlines the design of the thesis, detailing the data collection and qualitative methods applied in the empirical studies. It further explains the analytical strategy adopted and includes a methodological reflection. Chapter 5 summarises the results of the research papers and their overall contribution to the thesis. Chapter 6 presents the Job Transition Model and applies its conceptual and theoretical framework to the discussion of the findings in relation to the aim and research questions. Finally, Chapter 7 presents the conclusions, considering implications and directions for future research.

## **2. Literature review**

A central theme of the thesis is the impact of organisational restructuring on workers and their adaptation to their new work situations. To understand the dynamics and outcomes of these restructuring processes, it is essential to first define organisational restructuring and identify the key stakeholders involved.

### **2.1. Organisational restructuring**

Organisational restructuring, which may include mergers, acquisitions, downsizing, outsourcing, and facility closures, are strategies used by organisations to improve their results (McLachlan et al., 2022). These strategies can be proactive or reactive to critical events (cf. Gandolfi, 2013; Johnstone, 2023). One such event was the COVID-19 pandemic, which had widespread impacts on the labour market and affected organisations, working conditions and individual workers (Eurofound, 2021).

Such restructuring processes often bring significant changes to working conditions including job cuts, salary reductions, shortened working hours, and even job terminations (McLachlan et al., 2022). While such measures are typically introduced to reduce costs, such as payroll or operational expenses, they also carry risks for organisations. These risks include the loss of human capital and key competencies, increased staff turnover, reduced productivity, negative impacts on the work environment, and diminished innovation capacity (cf. McGrath, 2024; Sahdev, 2006). Although intended to improve organisational survival, restructuring inevitably introduces change for workers, requiring them to adapt to new roles, responsibilities, or employment status.

The organisational restructuring examined in this thesis encompasses processes involving both headcount reductions and work reorganisation, which are two distinct but often interconnected approaches to restructuring (Johnstone, 2023). These measures can be permanent, such as layoffs or reorganisation of work roles, or temporary, such as the implementation of STW schemes aimed to reduce working hours. Regardless of whether they are short or long term, such interventions have significant impact on workers' employment situations. For

example, the implementation of STW schemes have been linked to reduced labour market mobility (Swedish National Mediation Office, 2020) while reorganising work roles may result in various forms of lock-in effects. These effects occur when workers' mobility is constrained and reorganisation turns previously attractive roles into less desirable ones (cf. Feenstra-Verschure et al., 2023). Lock-in can manifest at different levels, within a specific role, within an organisation or even across an entire sector, limiting workers' ability to transition to new opportunities (Feenstra-Verschure et al., 2023). To understand how organisational restructuring affects both organisational outcomes and workers' experiences, a broader perspective is needed (McGrath, 2024), one which situates workers' role within this wider system as elaborated below.

Workers are a part of a broader system, the labour market, and Wallo et al. (2016) conceptualise workers' transitions in and out of organisations in their workforce flow model as the movement between the internal and external labour markets. These transitions are often shaped by different organisational initiatives such as restructuring and redundancies. Wallo et al. (2016) furthermore emphasise how organisations operate within an interconnected system of macro, meso and micro levels which influence, and are influenced by, the others. Consequently, these levels need to be understood in relation to one another rather than studied in isolation.

At the micro level, attention is directed toward individual and group-specific dynamics, including workers responses to change (cf. de Jong et al., 2016; Leana & Feldman, 1988) and communication strategies during restructuring (Bergström & Arman, 2017; Bui et al., 2019). These factors shape how workers perceive and experience organisational restructuring. The meso level concerns organisational structures and industry specific factors, such as technological innovations or consumer behaviour shifts, which may alter demand and drive organisational restructuring (cf. MacKenzie et al., 2017; Reynolds & Kincaid, 2023). At the macro level, broader societal and economic factors, such as globalisation or periods of economic recession or growth, create pressures which impact organisations to adapt to remain competitive, often triggering restructuring processes (Gandolfi, 2013). Labour

market policies further play a role by influencing employment protection, working conditions, and support mechanisms during restructuring, thereby directly affecting the situation of individual workers (McLachlan et al., 2022).

Although this thesis primarily focuses on the micro level, it acknowledges the influence of macro and meso level dynamics. These levels form a complex system in which changes at one level can impact others. This interplay will be revisited in the discussion section, for instance when examining how state interventions such as STW shape organisational approaches to restructuring which, in turn, affect outcomes for workers. Understanding these interdependencies is essential to fully understanding restructuring from the workers' perspective. Building on this, it is also important to recognise that the type of restructuring employed shapes its consequences in distinct ways (Johnstone, 2023). With this broader context in mind, the next chapter turns to the core focus of this thesis: workers' perspectives, beginning with conditions for mobility and transitions.

## **2.2. Worker mobility and job transitions**

Job transitions refer to changes in workers' job situations and can either be voluntary, e.g. seeking advancement and change, or involuntary, e.g. job loss (De Vos et al., 2021). For a job transition to occur, some form of mobility must take place, e.g. movement within or between jobs, whether in the internal or external labour market. Importantly, job mobility is not always beneficial. Involuntary transitions, which involve moving from employment to unemployment or underemployment, can have adverse effects on individuals' health and financial stability (cf. Furåker, 2014). However, despite their involuntary nature, some workers may perceive these transitions as opportunities and respond positively (Zikic & Klehe, 2006). This thesis focuses on involuntary changes in work situations, whether they occur within an organisation or involve movement out into the external labour market.

Opportunities for job transitions are shaped by both individual and contextual factors. At the individual level, characteristics such as well-being, motivation and openness to change influence the likelihood of transition (Bernhard-Oettel & Näswall, 2015). These factors reflect a

worker's agency, i.e. their capacity to act and make decisions about their future (Leana & Feldman, 1990). However, agency is exercised within broader structural and cultural contexts which include labour market conditions, institutional support, and social norms (Gardiner et al., 2009).

Beyond individual agency, labour market dynamics, such as job availability, skill demand, and alignment between workers' skill and employer needs, also play a critical role (cf. Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Feldman & Ng, 2007; Furåker et al., 2014). Workers adopt various approaches to manage transitions which range from strategic, long-term planning to more spontaneous, opportunistic decisions. These strategies reflect varying levels of intentionality and adaptability, shaped by both personal preferences and external constraints (MacKenzie et al., 2025).

Individuals with lower levels of education tend to experience reduced prospects of securing new employment following job loss compared to those possessing higher educational qualifications (Gonäs et al., 2006). In sectors with a high proportion of low-educated workers, such as the hotel sector studied in this thesis, skill match becomes crucial to enable job transitions. Many workers in this sector receive informal or on-the-job training which may limit formal recognition and mobility across industries (Cassel et al., 2018). Consequently, workers with low formal education and informal skill development are at greater risk of becoming locked-in to positions with limited transition opportunities, even when they wish to transit to new employment (Furåker et al., 2014).

Furthermore, demographic characteristics such as gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity also play a role in shaping individuals' opportunities and act as structural constraints (Gonäs et al., 2006). Women, e.g., are at increased risk of hourly underemployment (Acosta-Ballesteros et al., 2021) or permanent temporariness (Gonäs & Westin, 1993) following job loss. This means that while they may successfully re-enter the labour market, it may result in part-time or temporary roles.

Furthermore, geographic location can shape workers' opportunities for job transitions (Stengård et al., 2019). It influences not only the types of jobs available but also workers' abilities to access them in terms of their capacity for geographical mobility (Fischer & Malmberg, 2001). In some cases, geographical mobility becomes a prerequisite for reaching broader labour market opportunities, particularly in regions where local job availability is limited (cf. Kolk, 2017).

In discussions on labour market mobility, it is useful to distinguish between job security and employment security. Job security refers to the stability of a specific position, while employment security relates to the broader ability to secure new employment in the event of job loss (Zekic, 2016). Employment security is shaped by both individual factors, such as skill (cf. Martinaitis et al., 2021) and willingness to transition (Bernhard-Oettel & Näswall, 2015), and overall labour market conditions (MacKenzie et al., 2025). Over time, the responsibility for maintaining employment security has gradually shifted toward to the individual as part of broader flexibilisation trends (cf. Berntson & Marklund, 2010) and services, which were previously part of the Swedish state's responsibility, now increasingly rest on a solution grounded in collective agreements (Bergström & Styhre, 2021). At the same time, institutional support structures continue to play a role in strengthening individuals' opportunities for securing employment throughout their working lives (cf. McLachlan et al., 2022). These support structures vary across countries and significantly influence an individual's ability to navigate their job transition (MacKenzie et al., 2025; Sjöberg, 2010). Within this context, the Swedish restructuring model is often regarded as comparatively generous, offering extensive transition support through collective agreements which cover a large share of the workforce (Scott, 2021).

Building on the above discussion about mobility and job transitions, the focus now shifts to the consequences of organisational restructuring for workers.

### **2.3. Restructuring outcomes for workers**

When organisational restructuring occurs, all workers are affected in one way or another. Individual workers may experience a range of

consequences during organisational restructuring, shaped by broader organisational and contextual factors (cf. Hellgren et al., 2005; MacKenzie et al., 2025; McLachlan et al., 2021). Involuntary changes and uncertainty are common and, regardless of their new employment status, individuals often face disruptions in their working lives with job insecurity emerging as a central concern. Here understood as the fear of unwanted and involuntary changes in employment (Hellgren et al., 1999), job security can be qualitative, relating to job content changes, or quantitative, concerning the threat of job loss. During the pandemic, maintaining job security became a major challenge, affecting not only those at risk of redundancy but also those on job retention schemes (Stuart et al., 2021) such as Sweden's STW programme.

Theoretical debates on restructuring outcomes traditionally categorise workers affected by restructuring into two groups: *Survivors*, who remain in employment after restructuring, and *Victims*, who lose their jobs (Bennett et al., 1995; Brockner et al., 1987; Devine et al., 2003). *Victims* are theorised to experience immediate consequences of job loss including financial strain, loss of identity and disruptions to social structures and routines. Their outcomes are shaped both by the loss of the work's latent functions (Bennett et al., 1995; Jahoda, 1982) and the challenges of navigating job search (Leana & Feldman, 1995; Nonnis et al., 2023). *Survivors* are often found facing survivor syndrome, which is a combination of job insecurity, reduced organisational trust, and guilt towards redundant colleagues (Brockner, 1992). It also involves risks to well-being, lowered commitment, and concerns about future redundancy, illustrating that remaining in work is not always seen as a positive experience (George & Maheshwari, 2026; Langster & Cutrer, 2021).

However, a third group has more recently been introduced, *Endurers*, i.e. those who retain employment but lose their job roles (cf. McLachlan et al., 2021). *Endurers*, thus, experience role loss without exiting the organisation. Consequences for this group of workers include disruptions to career opportunities, skill mismatch, and a sense of occupational displacement despite remaining in employment (McLachlan et al., 2021).

The theorisation of these categories underpins a central component of the development of the Job Transition Model, which demonstrates how restructuring outcomes are linked to workers' movements across different dimensions of the labour market. It is also the ground for the development of a fourth category, *Liminals*, which is introduced to capture experiences which fall in between the existing categories. The following sections distinguish between the outcome categories to clarify the specific effects and implications for different worker groups following organisational restructuring.

### **2.3.1. Workers who face job loss**

One classic study on the consequences of job loss and unemployment is the Marienthal study conducted in the 1930s and later analysed by Jahoda (1982). This study demonstrated that employment provides not only an economic function but also several latent functions. These include giving structure to daily life, providing social contact, enforcing activity, and contributing to a sense of purpose, identity and personal status (Jahoda, 1982). Although societal conditions have changed since Jahoda's seminal work, her findings continue to inspire contemporary research on unemployment and its psychosocial impacts (cf. Beck et al., 2025; Paul et al., 2023; Selenko et al., 2011; Stiglbauer & Batinic, 2012).

As noted in the previous section, workers who lose their jobs following organisational restructuring are theorised under the term *Victims* (cf. Bennett et al., 1995; DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1986). The context in which this job loss occurs is crucial and varies significantly across nations. Access to support systems, such as unemployment benefits, retraining programmes and social networks, can significantly mitigate the negative effects associated with job loss (Sjöberg, 2010) as well as longer notice periods to give workers time to prepare for transition (Rydell & Wigblad, 2012). While the most immediate consequence of job loss is the loss of income, the effects extend far beyond financial hardship and also affect redundant workers' families (Brand, 2015; Gardiner et al., 2009; Leana & Feldman, 1990), with varying impacts depending on whether the worker is the primary or sole income earner. Beyond the potential for financial assistance, the family situation also plays an

important role in offering emotional and social support in the period following job loss (Gush et al., 2015b).

Furthermore, redundant workers often experience consequences related to self-esteem, stigma, and loss of dignity (Gush et al., 2015a; Hiswåls et al., 2017). These effects can have long-term health implications especially during prolonged periods of unemployment. While re-employment helps mitigate some of these negative outcomes, it does not fully erase them (Brand, 2015).

While facing the consequences of job loss, workers must also navigate the labour market to secure new employment, a process which is both complex and demanding and may even lead to burnout (Nonnis et al., 2023). Moreover, redundant workers also risk transition into jobs of lower quality, compared to their previous employment. External shocks, such as the pandemic, further intensify these challenges by reducing job availability and increasing competition, making successful transition even more difficult during periods of large-scale redundancies (cf. Cederlöf, 2024).

Beyond these immediate challenges, redundant workers also face the risk of transition into underemployment (Stromback, 2010). Underemployment refers to situations where an individual's job does not fully utilise an individual's available working hours and/or skills, resulting in a mismatch between their potential and their actual employment conditions (Heyes & Tomlinson, 2021; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). A third dimension of underemployment relates specifically to earnings, where wages fall below the living wage, affecting financial security and the ability to plan for the future (Feldman, 1996). The three types of underemployment often intersect and are connected to additional forms of deprivation, such as limited access to time structure, social relations and a sense of purpose or identity, highlighting that underemployment is a multidimensional condition rather than a purely financial one (Beck et al., 2025).

Redundant workers may also experience job churning, i.e. the repeated cycling between short-term or temporary contracts with limited prospects for permanence (MacKenzie et al., 2025; Worth, 2005). These

transitions can include periods of temporary employment, unemployment but also periods of parental leave, sick leave or other forms of temporary withdrawal from the labour market (Davies & Esseveld, 1989). Such interruptions often have a disproportionate impact on, e.g., women's job transitions as their chances of returning to employment of comparable quality are typically lower (Gonäs et al., 2006; Gonäs & Westin, 1993). Such patterns not only undermine career stability but also restrict opportunities for skill development, increasing vulnerability and reducing employability throughout an individual's work life (De Vos et al., 2021).

While research has documented the characteristics of the jobs which workers transition into following redundancy (Brand, 2015), and it may take up to seven years to regain pre-restructuring job quality (Cederlöf, 2024), less attention has been paid to the process of how workers navigate their changed situation (MacKenzie et al., 2025; Mussagulova et al., 2023). Specifically, there is limited understanding of how workers reason about their choices and how they navigate between different labour market statuses such as employment, unemployment, and underemployment (Heyes & Tomlinson, 2021).

### **2.3.2. Workers remaining after organisational restructuring**

As discussed above, workers who retain their positions after organisational restructuring are often theoretically framed as *Survivors* (cf. Brockner et al., 1987; De Vries & Balazs, 1997; Gandolfi, 2013; Langster & Cutrer, 2021; McLachlan et al., 2021). Research indicates that the consequences for these individuals can be severe and sometimes even greater than for workers who lose their jobs (Devine et al., 2003). *Survivors'* reactions are strongly shaped by how fairly they perceive redundant colleagues have been treated (Brockner et al., 1987) which may lead to survivor syndrome, characterised by feelings of guilt toward colleagues who have lost their jobs (Gandolfi & Hansson, 2011). Negative effects may arise both during and after the restructuring process, with risks for both short and longer term declines in wellbeing. However, there is still a gap to fill to order to attain a deeper understanding of the factors shaping workers' experiences and how individual resources may help mitigate these effects (de Jong et al., 2016).

Further consequences of restructuring can include increased workloads, elevated stress and conflicts, heightened job insecurity and anxiety, decreased trust in management, reduced motivation and risk-taking, higher absence rates, and lower levels of organisational involvement, commitment, and productivity (Gandolfi & Hansson, 2011; Langster & Cutrer, 2021). Changes in work roles may also affect workers' perceptions of their work identity, career prospects and willingness to remain within the organisation (cf. Chen & Reay, 2021; Yates, 2022). These new work roles may involve unfamiliar work tasks which require the acquisition of new skills, both a demanding and time-consuming process. In cases where little or no support is offered in the retraining process, a change of task may further exacerbate stress levels (Amundson et al., 2004; Boyd et al., 2014).

A third outcome category, termed *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021), refers to workers who remain within the organisation but transition into new work roles following the threat of redundancy. As highlighted earlier in this chapter, these individuals are made redundant from their previous role but not from the employment itself, and therefore share experiences with both *Survivors* and *Victims* (McLachlan et al., 2021). *Endurers* often face disruptions in their career paths and potential skill mismatches, and the transition can involve emotional strain and uncertainty particularly when support and clarity are lacking (Brockner, 1992; McLachlan et al., 2021). Given the significant differences among restructuring outcomes, it is suggested that organisations manage these workers in distinct ways, as their need for support varies (McLachlan et al., 2021).

While *Endurers* experience role changes, they may also retain their jobs under altered working conditions which introduce a different set of challenges. Restructuring studies within the retail sector show that one common effect is the loss of guaranteed working hours and the introduction of customised schedules designed to match fluctuating customer demand (Arman et al., 2021). When workers are thinly spread across such scheduling, opportunities for both formal and informal meetings diminish which undermine collective sense-making (Arman et al., 2021). This disruption to interaction not only weakens workers' abilities to unite and articulate a collective voice, but also risks shifting

power relations within the organisation to the detriment of the workers.

Regarding their future work situation, some studies suggest that workers who undergo role changes may report less fear of future redundancies compared to colleagues whose roles remain unchanged, possibly due to perceived increases in adaptability and organisational relevance (Hellgren et al., 2005). However, others highlight the risk of becoming trapped in a cycle of internal labour market churn, marked by repeated reassignment to new roles without long-term stability. This can lead to ongoing uncertainty about potential future restructuring processes, and may undermine career development and increase turnover intentions (MacKenzie & McLachlan, 2023).

To mitigate these negative outcomes, several organisational strategies have been proposed. These include providing clarity about the restructuring process, supporting change management (de Jong et al., 2016) and assisting workers in the adaptation to their new work roles (Brockner, 1992). Additional recommendations involve engaging workers' representatives, maintaining effective communicating during the restructuring process, framing a clear vision for the future workplace, and offering voluntary exit options for those who are considering leaving the organisation (cf. Bergström & Arman, 2017; Forde et al., 2009).

#### **2.4. Research on the effects of STW**

As the previous sections showed, internal organisational restructuring processes and worker transitions are not shaped by the organisation alone. They are also influenced by broader labour market policies which impact opportunities and constraints facing both workers and employers (cf. Wallo et al., 2016). One of the most significant external policy instruments employed during the pandemic was the STW schemes. This section therefore reviews existing STW research with a brief background and practical overview of STW schemes being provided in Chapter 3.

STW schemes have proven effective in preserving jobs during economic downturns, especially when implemented through stable, rule-based systems rather than temporary discretionary measures (Giupponi et

al., 2022). Comparing countries which rely primarily on STW schemes versus unemployment support, Giupponi et al. (2022) conclude that STW is most effective during temporary downturns while unemployment support is better suited for persistent shocks, although they should be viewed as complementary tools.

However, STW schemes tend to benefit workers within organisations, especially those in permanent positions, potentially at the expense of those at risk of layoff or already outside in the external labour market (cf. Bermudez et al., 2023). This dynamic can reinforce labour market segmentation, potentially deepening the divide between insiders and outsiders. The more permanent positions are protected, the more difficult it becomes for outsiders to gain access to stable employment (Bermudez et al., 2023; Cahuc, 2019).

During the pandemic, all EU member states implemented some form of job retention scheme to mitigate the effects of the economic downturn (Müller et al., 2022). One such scheme is STW, which was applied in Sweden. However, STW schemes are not implemented without challenges. Extended use of STW may hinder worker mobility by anchoring workers in low-productivity organisations, leading to inefficient labour hoarding (Giupponi & Landais, 2023). To avoid negative reallocation effects, it is suggested that the duration of STW should be limited and offer targeted support to organisations with strong productivity potential (Giupponi & Landais, 2023). Further, generous subsidies and relaxed oversight can encourage overuse, raising concerns about long-term efficiency (Arranz et al., 2019).

Grek (2024) emphasises the need to critically evaluate the effectiveness of publicly funded support structures such as STW schemes. Beyond evaluating economic outcomes, it is equally important to examine workers' experience of STW implementation both for workers directly affected and those indirectly impacted. However, such studies remain scarce as research in this area mainly has focused on macroeconomic indications (Cahuc, 2024).

Building on this gap, while most STW research has focused on organisational and labour market outcomes (Bermudez et al., 2023), some

studies can be related to outcomes for the workers themselves. For instance, STW can protect workers from layoffs by offering temporary relief from the threat of job loss. In contrast, laid-off workers often face greater difficulty in re-entering employment (Cahuc, 2024). Moreover, STW has been shown to have protective effects on worker health compared to the typical health consequences of job loss, such as depression and anxiety (Blomqvist et al., 2023).

However, STW implementation is not without psychosocial risks. Klug et al. (2024) show that STW can heighten job insecurity with lingering effects on employee well-being even after the scheme ends. Similarly, Zabel et al. (2025) found that workers on STW often experience uncertainty regarding future employment, particularly in organisations which are also undergoing restructuring, leading to both job insecurity and financial stress. Moreover, Rodriguez Conde et al. (2025) argue that STW may lead to qualitative job insecurity, where the content of work is threatened especially among workers who previously enjoyed stable employment, and thereby negatively affecting psychological well-being and job satisfaction.

The limited number of studies which examine the worker-level consequences of STW participation (Cahuc, 2024) highlight the need for qualitative research that explores how such measures affect workers. By examining workers' experiences and outcomes in this context, this thesis directly addresses this gap by offering a worker-centred perspective on how organisational restructuring involving STW is experienced and navigated. This analysis also extends to, and can be applied in, the Job Transitional Model.

## **2.5. Connections between internal and external labour markets in the context of organisational restructuring**

Some of the consequences and mechanisms associated with job loss also appear among workers who remain in the organisation post-restructuring. Internal redeployment, when workers are reassigned to new roles, is one example. This phenomenon is explored by MacKenzie and McLachlan (2023) in their analysis of job churning within the internal labour market. Their findings mirror patterns seen in the external labour market, especially during economic downturns when

workers frequently and involuntarily change jobs. Internal job churning can lead to job insecurity, hinder career progression, and turnover intentions (MacKenzie & McLachlan, 2023). These dynamics demonstrate the interconnectedness and shared mechanisms of internal and external labour markets, an interpretation which is central to this thesis.

Traditionally, the internal labour market has been defined as the system of employment structures within an organisation, governed by administrative rules and practices which supplant market forces (Doeringer & Piore, 1971). In contrast, the external labour market encompasses the broader labour market outside the organisation. Despite being formally separated by organisational boundaries, they continuously influence each other and shape patterns of labour market mobility (Grimshaw et al., 2001).

Earlier theorisation presented the internal labour market as a self-contained system offering internal mobility, career development, and the possibility of remaining within the same organisation throughout one's working life (Williamson et al., 1975), although with variation across industries and occupations (Doeringer & Piore, 1971). Within such a system, job security is typically higher as positions are predominantly filled internally and movement are regulated by established rules (cf. Doeringer & Piore, 1971; MacKenzie & McLachlan, 2023). However, later research indicates tendencies showing that several of these traditional characteristics have changed; influenced by both shifts internally, such as technological developments and organisational restructuring, and by external changes including globalisation and changes in employee relations (Grimshaw et al., 2001). This has, in turn, contributed to a more flexible and less secure internal labour market structure, where even the existence of stable internal labour markets has been called into question (Lee, 2015).

It is therefore necessary to nuance the concept of internal labour market as used in this thesis. While internal labour markets in industries such as steel have been described as still being relatively strong and closed systems (cf. MacKenzie & McLachlan, 2023), the internal labour market context within hotels presents a different picture. Baum (2007)

describes the internal labour markets within hospitality as weak, with high staff turnover and limited opportunities for career progression. Yet other studies suggest that career advancement within the internal labour market is still possible as hands-on experience is often valued over formal education (Cassel et al., 2018).

Thus, while internal labour markets in the hotel sector do offer some opportunities for internal movement and career development, they do not function as closed systems where positions are exclusively filled internally. In contrast, mobility between hotels is high, so changing employers is relatively easy for workers when necessary (Baum, 2007). This suggests that the boundaries between the internal and external labour market is more porous than traditional theory on internal labour market assumes (cf. Doeringer & Piore, 1971).

For this reason, this thesis does not treat the internal labour markets within the hotels sector as closed systems. Instead, it conceptualises how organisational boundaries dividing the labour market into internal (within the organisation) and external (outside the organisation) parts of the broader labour market. This distinction becomes particularly relevant in the organisational restructuring context, where workers' outcomes are often categorised according to whether they remain or exit the organisation (cf. Gandolfi, 2013; Langster & Cutrer, 2021; McLachlan et al., 2021). At the same time, debates have highlighted the existence of a grey zone between these dimensions, positions which place workers simultaneously inside and outside organisational boundaries. Concepts such as permanent temporariness (Gonäs & Westin, 1993) illustrate how workers may become trapped in a permanent state of temporary employment engagements, which can be interpreted as churning between the internal and external labour market. This challenges the dualistic view of labour market positions consisting only of employment and unemployment (Davies & Esseveld, 1989), a perspective further developed through research on underemployment (Beck et al., 2025; Feldman, 1996).

The scope of this thesis includes both sides of the organisational boundaries and focuses on how workers navigate the labour market internally, externally, and within the *Liminality*. As conceptualised in

Paper III (Storman & Rydell, 2025), *Liminality* captures this in-between labour market dimension, and refers to the space which exists between employment, underemployment, and unemployment in which workers experience characteristics of both employment and unemployment.

Building on theories presented in this chapter, the thesis engages with established understanding of organisational restructuring and involuntary job transitions (Gardiner et al., 2009; Leana & Feldman, 1990; MacKenzie et al., 2025), while including workers with diverse post-restructuring outcomes (cf. Devine et al., 2003) across the internal labour market (Doeringer & Piore, 1971), the external labour market, and the liminal space, argued in this thesis, to exist between them. This requires starting from workers' pre-restructuring position in the internal labour market and then following transitions to theorisation of restructuring outcomes as *Victims* (Bennett et al., 1995), *Survivors* (Brockner et al., 1987), *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021), or *Liminals*. Incorporating the implementation of STW further enables the thesis to examine how such measures reshape existing knowledge about organisational restructuring processes (Cahuc, 2024). Taken together, these perspectives support an analysis of workers' transitions across both the internal and external labour market and aims to understand how the restructuring outcomes overlap and potentially even influence each other. This theoretical foundation informs the development of the Job Transition Model, presented in the discussion chapter.

The next chapter provides the background and context of this thesis.

### **3. Background and context**

This chapter outlines the contextual conditions shaping hotel workers experiences during the pandemic. It first introduces the Swedish pandemic context and the state interventions, with a focus on STW. It then provides an overview of the Swedish labour market characteristics before turning to the hotel sector and its specific exposure to the crisis.

#### **3.1. The Swedish context during the pandemic**

Sweden adopted a distinctive approach during the pandemic by refraining from imposing a full national lockdown (SOU, 2022). This strategy shaped everyday life in Sweden in ways which differed from many other Western countries and so forms an important context in this thesis. While the pandemic caused global disruptions to daily life, employment and economic activity, Sweden's approach created a unique national context in which these effects unfolded.

Rather than imposing strict restrictions on people's movement, the Swedish government relied on guidelines and voluntary adjustments. Individuals were, e.g., encouraged to maintain good hygiene, practise social distancing, work from home when possible, and self-quarantine if themselves or a household member tested positive for COVID-19 (Ludvigsson, 2023). At certain points, recommendations also included avoiding public transport and long-distance travel, e.g. no more than two hours from home. Large gatherings were banned and remote learning was recommended for secondary and higher education institutions (Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2024). The approach was based on trust and individual responsibility, aiming to reduce social interactions without enforcing rigid measures. Overall, the approach proved relatively successful (Andersson & Jonung, 2024), mitigating the labour market impact compared to many other countries. In managing the crisis, early decisions prioritised speed over precision, reflecting a strategy where rapid action was considered more critical than detailed accuracy (SOU, 2022).

##### ***3.1.1. State interventions with a focus on STW***

In response to the economic downturn, the government introduced several support measures which aimed to stabilise the labour market

and support organisations, e.g. STW schemes, and tax deferrals to provide temporary financial relief to struggling businesses (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2021; Visita, 2022a). Beyond immediate crisis management, there were also initiatives aimed at strengthening organisations' long-term resilience such as promoting skill development during reduced working hours under STW. These initiatives offered workers the opportunities to upskill while maintaining employment, with the goal being to prepare organisations for post-crisis recovery (Swedish National Mediation Office, 2020). However, despite their potential, such initiatives were introduced relatively late and were underutilised, thereby limiting their overall impact.

This thesis focuses primarily on STW schemes and their role in shaping organisational restructuring, given their central role during the pandemic (Müller et al., 2022). STW was made available early on as an option for organisations who faced a temporary drop in demand and it became one of the main labour market support tools in Sweden and across Europe (Swedish National Mediation Office, 2020). Through STW, organisations could temporarily reduce workers' working hours while the State provided partial compensation for the hours not worked through income support (cf. Eurofound, 2021). Initially, STW in Sweden could even be applied to workers who had received notice of redundancy, although this provision was later restricted i.e. a temporary opportunity (Swedish National Mediation Office, 2020).

The current form of STW was first used in Sweden during the COVID-19 pandemic (Swedish National Mediation Office, 2020), although it was developed after the financial crisis in 2008-2009 to prevent future mass unemployment (Ahlstrand et al., 2025). Globally, STW systems vary in funding models and implementation (Eurofound, 2023), yet share the same common purpose: to safeguard employment and competence within organisations so that they are better prepared to recover when economic conditions improve (Arranz et al., 2020). Despite differences in generosity and ongoing debates about whether the benefits primarily favour workers or employers (cf. Juranek et al., 2021; Svalund et al., 2025), the core objective is to protect employment contracts by reducing working hours and thereby lowering salary costs.

In Sweden, private organisations could apply for STW if a collective agreement was in place or if at least 70 % of workers consented, and only if financial difficulties were temporary. During the pandemic, the government temporarily covered a larger share of costs than normally stipulated by law (Ahlstrand et al., 2025). Workers nevertheless received reduced income for non-worked hours, which differed depending on the applied STW level (Swedish National Mediation Office, 2020). Organisations could apply for four levels of support from the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, corresponding to 20-80 % of reduced working hours (Swedish National Mediation Office, 2020). Given the far-reaching and widespread impact of the pandemic, STW remained in use for approximately 1.5 years (Swedish Agency for Growth Policy Analysis, 2021). However, decisions about extensions were often made late and in stages, creating uncertainty and making it difficult for organisational planning.

Although STW was ready to use early in the pandemic, the system proved complex. Social partners and workers found the system complex and difficult to understand (DN, 2025), with frequent changes, and implementation, which took place under time pressure, came with challenges and the risk of making mistakes (Swedish National Mediation Office, 2020). Furthermore, the rapid economic downturn created intense pressure to negotiate local STW agreements, often in parallel with redundancy negotiations. Unions and employer organisations played a key role in developing agreement templates and coordinated crisis responses to support local negotiations. Despite the rapid pace and complexity of the situation, the Hotel and Restaurant union alone concluded thousands of local agreements during March and April 2020, with many more negotiated across other sectors (Swedish National Mediation Office, 2020).

Although STW was a key measure during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was only one among several measures and operated within the existing Swedish labour market structures. Collective agreements were again essential in enabling and shaping its implementation, just as they are for job transition support following redundancies. STW thus complemented rather than replaced these existing structures. The next section

therefore outlines the broader characteristics of the Swedish labour market.

### **3.2. The Swedish labour market**

Sweden's labour market is characterised by its negotiation-oriented approach in which restructuring and job transitions are largely governed through collective agreements rather than direct state intervention (Ministry of Finance, 2017). Social partners therefore play a central role in shaping labour market policies as well as restructuring processes, participating actively in both policy formulation and implementation (Ministry of Finance, 2017). Sweden is thus categorised as a coordinated market economy with strong active labour market policies (Bergström & Styhre, 2021).

The restructuring model combines labour laws, notably the Employment Protection Act (LAS), with collective agreements. LAS stipulates notification periods for redundancy (1–6 months depending on employment tenure) and applies the “last-in-first-out” principle, while the Preferential Right to Re-employment legislation (Återanställningsrätt) permits laid-off workers to be rehired within nine months if similar positions become available at their previous employer (SFS, 1982:20). The restructuring model emphasises support for redundant workers including access to education and training which facilitates skill alignment with evolving labour market demand. These mechanisms enable qualitative adaption to new economic conditions by protecting the right to work rather than preserving specific jobs which may no longer be viable (cf. Ministry of Finance, 2017).

Job security councils play a key role by assisting workers facing job loss with the transition to new employment (McLachlan et al., 2022). During the main data collection period for this thesis, prior to the October 2022 reform, these councils covered approximately 88 % of the Swedish workforce (Swedish National Mediation Office, 2024). Workers outside this coverage typically include those in workplaces without collective agreements and, in some cases, individuals on part-time and short-term employment contracts.

Collective agreements ensure structured support during job transition and, thus, have the aim to contribute to not only a more stable but also adaptable labour market (McLachlan et al., 2022). Beyond national institutions, sector-specific conditions also shape how restructuring processes unfold and are experienced. The following section therefore turns to the conditions of the hotel sector during the pandemic.

### **3.3. The Swedish hotel sector and the pandemic**

The hotel sector is a central part of the Swedish service economy and an important entry point to the labour market (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2020). Before the pandemic, the hospitality sector employed approximately 200,000 individuals (Vista, 2022a), contributed 2.4% - 2.7% of Sweden's GDP, and expanded its workforce by 32% between 2000 and 2020 (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2020). In addition, persistent labour shortages and high staff turnover prompted forecasts of an annual need of 40,000 new workers between 2013 and 2023 (BFUF, 2014).

The sector is characterised by a high share of temporary and part-time contracts both internationally (Baum et al., 2020) and nationally (Larsson, 2022a). In Sweden, approximately 42 % of employment contracts were temporary (Swedish Public Employment Service, 2020) and it employs large numbers of women, young people, migrants and workers with comparatively low formal education (Baum, 2007; Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2023). Income levels are generally lower than in many other service industries (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2023) and insecure, low-wage employment is common (Baum et al., 2020; Ilsøe, 2016). In addition to wages, however, earnings are frequently supplemented by tips, particularly for serving staff, which, depending on the workplace, can constitute a substantial portion of a worker's total income (cf. Ulfsdotter Eriksson & Flisbäck, 2011).

The composition of employment contracts and workforce is also reflected in unionisation levels. Union density is generally lower among workers on temporary or part-time contracts and among workers with a foreign background, conditions which are prevalent in the hotel sector. In hotel and restaurants, union density is approximately 34-38 %,

compared to around 70 % in manufacturing and 66 % in the Swedish labour market overall (Larsson, 2022b). These differences reflect structural variations in employment patterns and in sectors characterised by high turnover, seasonal work, and potentially fragmented workplaces, unions face challenges in organising workers (cf. Arman et al., 2021).

The hotel sector also differs from the manufacturing sector, which has traditionally been the primary focus of many restructuring studies (cf. Cederlöf, 2024; Gonäs et al., 2006) in other ways. As part of the broader service industry, hotels face unique challenges. One of the most fundamental differences is the inability to stock or store services. Unlike manufactured goods, hotel services are time-sensitive and must be produced and consumed in real time, making the sector highly sensitive to fluctuations in demand (Visita, 2022b).

Together, these structural characteristics create vulnerabilities for workers. As the hotel sector is an important provider of accessible job opportunities (Baum et al., 2016), economic downturns intensify competition for remaining vacancies. This disproportionately affects job seekers with limited education, shorter work experience, or long-term unemployment who rely on entry-level jobs (cf. Swedish Public Employment Service, 2020). As the sector heavily relies on low-skilled workers, these groups are particularly vulnerable in the event of mass-redundancies (Fugate et al., 2004). Lower education levels limit mobility across sectors and make job transitions challenging (cf. Furåker, 2014), a vulnerability made visible when hotel demand plummeted during the pandemic (Eurofound, 2020).

When COVID-19 struck in 2020, the Swedish hotel sector entered its most severe crisis since World War II (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2021). Although Sweden never implemented a full lockdown, the combination of partial lockdowns, social-distancing recommendations, and restrictions on travel (Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2024) caused demand to collapse. The sector's inability to store services (Visita, 2022b) made it especially sensitive to these sudden drops. Foreign guest nights fell by 72 % in 2020 and the export

value of Swedish tourism declined by 80 billion SEK (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2021).

The sector's future quickly became uncertain and dependent on fluctuating infection levels and changing national restrictions. Recovery was prolonged and uneven, with new infection waves repeatedly undermining demand (SCB, 2021) resulting in heavy fluctuations at hotels, from being nearly empty to fully booked. Restrictions affecting the sector remained in place for nearly two years (cf. Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2024), leading to extensive organisational restructuring and redundancies (cf. Eurofound, 2020).

Approximately 25 % of the jobs in the hotel sector disappeared (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2021). Beyond these reported losses, workers on temporary contracts, who are typically the first to be laid off in economic downturns (Swedish Public Employment Service, 2020), were heavily affected. These job losses are not always captured in official statistics, implying that the actual pandemic job losses were likely higher than reported (cf. SCB, 2021).

The crisis was further aggravated by the sector's limited experience with large-scale downsizing or prolonged declines in demand, leaving it unprepared for the implementation of STW schemes or managing mass redundancies (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2021). The rapid introduction of the new STW system, combined with a lack of established routines, generated significant challenges and created a demanding situation for both employer organisations and unions (Swedish National Mediation Office, 2020).

However, the challenges did not end with the easing of restrictions. The pandemic accelerated long-term structural shifts in travel and work patterns, such as remote work, virtual meetings and digital collaboration, all of which contributed to the reduction of business travel (Hajal, 2022). In parallel, platforms such as Airbnb intensified competition and reshaped price dynamics and consumer expectations (Negi & Tripathi, 2023). These developments reflect broader transformations in mobility and accommodation driven by flexibility and digitalisation.

Despite these challenges, the hotel sector remains an important contributor to the Swedish labour market. Recruitment needs are substantial, with an estimated 137,000 new or replacement hires expected over the next three years (UHR, 2025). Demand for key roles such as chefs, serving staff, and hotel staff is expected to grow steadily (UHR, 2025), highlighting the sector's continued relevance in a changing labour market.

In sum, these conditions illustrated a sector profoundly affected by organisational restructuring during the crisis. Combined with its status as an under-researched context within restructuring research, this makes it a particularly relevant setting in which to examine how workers experience organisational restructuring and job transitions.

The next chapter now turns to the methodology and materials used in this study.

## **4. Methodology and material**

This chapter outlines the research design, data collection and analytical processing, and provides reflections on methodological considerations. It also includes discussion on researcher reflexivity and methodological limitations, and concludes with a declaration regarding the use of AI.

### **4.1. Research design**

Given the fact that I am a PhD candidate in working life science with a focus on workers' perspectives, this thesis adopts a critical approach grounded in a theory of science which emphasises the structural conditions of work and recognises the unequal power relationship between employers and workers (Sandberg, 2019). My research is situated in a tradition that foregrounds the voices of workers, which may be particularly important in contexts of organisational restructuring and involuntary job transitions where workers' agency and experiences are often underrepresented (cf. MacKenzie et al., 2025).

The thesis employs a qualitative case study design to explore workers' perspectives on organisational restructuring and involuntary job transitions. While many previous studies on job transition have focused on quantitative measures (cf. Cederlöf, 2024), this study takes a different approach by focusing on the depth and complexity of workers' experiences, dimensions which cannot be meaningfully captured through quantitative studies alone (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). A qualitative approach is appropriate when examining complex social phenomena as it enables rich, contextualised insights of how individuals interpret and respond to involuntary change (cf. Lim, 2024).

A qualitative case study design further supports this objective by enabling an in-depth examination of contemporary events within their real-world context, especially where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018). The study follows an intensive research design which aims to generate an in-depth understanding of processes, mechanisms and experiences within a specific context. In contrast to an extensive design focused on identifying broad patterns across large populations, an intensive design is appropriate when the goal is to explore how and why workers interpret and

respond to involuntary change (Cardano, 2019). Given the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic's evolving spread, restrictions and support structures, a case study approach was appropriate (Yin, 2018). The design allowed the restructuring to be followed as it developed in real time, in a context where external conditions were expected to shape both organisational responses and workers' experiences. Moreover, this design has previously proven to be effective in generating valuable insights into organisational restructuring processes (cf. Forde et al., 2009).

The methodological choices are grounded in the study's overarching aim: to examine hotel workers' experiences of organisational restructuring and job transition. An inductive research design is well suited to this purpose as it allows patterns, meaning and conceptual insights to emerge from workers' accounts rather than imposing predetermined categories from theory (Maxwell, 2009). By beginning with participants' narratives and moving towards broader interpretations, this design enables a nuanced understanding of how workers make sense of involuntary change within their specific organisational and sectoral contexts (Lim, 2024). Within this broader inductive approach, qualitative methods for data collection, in particular in-depth interviews, serve as key tools to capture workers' subjective experiences and the meanings individuals assign to their circumstances (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Similar approaches have been used successfully in previous research with comparable focus (cf. MacKenzie et al., 2006). These methodological choices reflect a commitment to amplifying workers' voices and acknowledging the complexity of their realities.

This study is grounded in constructivist epistemology which views knowledge as actively co-constructed through interaction rather than passively discovered (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This aligns with the use of qualitative research methods which prioritise interpretation, context, and meaning-making. Workers' experiences are therefore captured and understood through dialogue between participant and researcher, positioning the researcher as a co-creator of knowledge (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2019). The study also recognises that reality is not singular or fixed, but rather multiple and shaped by individual and collective experiences (Pandey et al., 2026). This philosophical position

underpins both the research design and guides the analytical approach which seeks to understand not just what happened, but also how participants experienced and interpreted these events.

This thesis was developed within a broader research project on organisational restructuring during the COVID-19 pandemic, funded by Afa insurance and approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (reference number: 2020–04420). The project’s advisory board comprised representatives from a trade union, an employer association, a job security council, and the Swedish Work Environment Authority. This board contributed to the initial sampling strategy by identifying a relevant part of the hospitality sector, suggesting workplaces to contact, and contributing to discussions and the validation of the findings throughout the process.

I was recruited into this project as a doctoral researcher which provided a valuable platform from which to examine workers’ experiences of involuntary change. While some aspects of the research design had already been established before my involvement, I had the opportunity to shape the direction of my own study within this framework. This included defining the specific focus of the thesis and its included papers, based on subsets of the collected data.

#### **4.1.1. The case study**

The study consists of one overarching case, the event: restructuring in the hotel sector during the pandemic with five embedded units representing individual workplaces. This multi-unit design enriches the analytical depth by make it possible to identify both shared patterns across the sector and variations linked to each workplace (Yin, 2009). While all interviews with workers were carried out individually, situating them within specific workplaces made it possible to understand workers’ experiences in relation to organisational structures and local labour market conditions.

The selection of the hotel sector was driven by a specific event (cf. Seawright & Gerring, 2008): the sector’s direct exposure to restructuring during the COVID-19 pandemic. This event-based strategy made it possible to study a context undergoing rapid and involuntary change and

provided a unique opportunity to examine the implementation of Sweden's newly developed STW system. Although the STW schemes were based on lessons from previous crises (Ahlstrand et al., 2025), it had not been used in practise prior to the pandemic and so made this an valuable opportunity for empirical investigation (cf. Swedish Agency for Growth Policy Analysis, 2021).

The five hotels included in the study varied in size, ownership structure and market segments, and were located in urban, semi-urban and rural areas in central Sweden. A key selection criterion was that the hotels had undergone organisational restructuring involving redundancies and the implementation of STW schemes, which in these cases involved extensive staff reductions, up to 80 %, together with extensive use of STW. The geographical variation among hotels was intentional. Geographical diversity made it possible to examine how local labour market contexts shaped the consequences of job loss. Workers' prospects depend on how severely their local labour market is affected, the availability of alternative employers, and local demand for specific competencies (Furåker et al., 2014). Including hotels within different labour market dynamics therefore enabled a broader understanding of how context influences both organisational decisions and workers' opportunities for re-employment. In addition, it later became evident that rural hotels, i.e. situated in the countryside, initially performed better as they were perceived to entail a lower risk of infection and were less dependent on international guests than urban hotels (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2020).

Hotel size was similarly relevant. Larger hotels tend to have more formalised HR organisations, while smaller hotels often operate with limited administration and more informal routines. Work roles also tend to be broader in smaller hotels, while larger hotels typically offer more hierarchical career pathways (cf. Lockyer & Scholarios, 2004).

The broader research project includes 68 interviews with a range of stakeholders such as workers, managers, HR staff, and representatives from unions, job security councils, and employer associations. While the thesis focuses on the worker perspective (based on 45 interviews), the remaining interviews (23) have been used to provide background

and contextual understanding in the analysis and accompanying papers. The sampling used in this thesis is presented below.

#### **4.2. Sampling and participants**

The thesis draws on 45 interviews with two groups of workers:

1. Workers who were made redundant (28, including 5 follow-ups)
2. Workers who remained employed after restructuring (17)

The narratives come from individuals whose working lives were profoundly disrupted by organisational restructuring during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their voices provide valuable insights into how workers navigated challenges such as uncertainty, change and job loss during an unprecedented crisis. The sample consists of 29 women and 11 men, ranging in age from early twenties to late fifties. Most participants held permanent contracts prior to restructuring, and their work roles spanned the majority of hotel operations, e.g. serving staff, bartenders, breakfast hosts, receptionists, conference coordinators, departmental team leaders, booking and marketing staff, and restaurant chefs (see Appendix 1). Some had long careers in hospitality and viewed the hotel as their professional home, while others were newer to the sector. Participants also varied in their life stages and family circumstances: some were primary breadwinners, others lived alone, and a few also supported extended family members. In contrast, some participants were themselves financially dependent on partners or relatives to make ends meet.

This study employed purposive sampling, identified in collaboration with the advisory board, to ensure relevance to the research questions (Campbell et al., 2020). To complement this approach and to reduce potential sampling bias, snowball sampling was also employed to widen access to a group of workers who were difficult to reach within the embedded units (cf. Parker et al., 2019), i.e. those with shorter notice periods who experienced job loss. This combined strategy enabled the inclusion of varied perspectives while maintaining a focus on workers affected by organisational restructuring.

The broader research project sought to include workers on temporary contracts. However, their shorter notice periods meant many left the

workplace early in the restructuring process. Their chances for re-employment to the organisation were also reduced by the Preferential Right to Re-employment legislation (Återanställningsrätt), which gave priority to previously laid-off permanent staff if rehiring occurred within nine months. These factors made temporary workers harder to reach. Although some are represented in the sample, the overall composition does not fully reflect the sector's typically high proportion of temporary employment contracts. Nevertheless, the final sample in this thesis aligns well with the aims of this thesis, and the limited access to temporary workers did not hinder the achievement of the thesis goals.

The interviews used in each paper vary depending on the specific focus, e.g. whether the emphasis is on experiences of navigating within the internal or the external labour market. Detailed information about the sample included in each paper is provided in the respective paper. An overview of all participants is available in Appendix 1.

#### ***4.2.1. Recruitment of participants***

Participants were approached through hotel management, union representatives, and peer referrals. The first contact with each workplace was established through telephone and email. Managers and union representatives at each hotel were given information about the study and participated in initial interviews. Due to travel restrictions, workplace visits were not allowed in the initial phase or throughout the interviews. As a result, all recruitment had to be conducted remotely (cf. Thunberg & Arnell, 2021), presenting certain challenges to make sure that information reached potential participants.

To spread information about the study, managers and union representatives distributed invitations to all workers. While this approach was relatively effective in reaching the target groups, it also introduced potential limitations as the recruitment process depended heavily on the willingness to share information about the study. After the first round of interviews, participants were asked to inform colleagues about the study and refer them for participation, thereby supporting the snowball sampling strategy (Parker et al., 2019). This method proved useful in accessing participant groups who were otherwise difficult to reach,

such as redundant workers with short notice periods who had already left their workplaces. Through this strategy, several additional participants from the selected hotels were recruited together with three participants who had previously worked at hotels other than those initially contacted.

### **4.3. Data collection**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen as the primary data collection tool due to their suitability for exploring personal experiences and narratives related to restructuring (Lim, 2024). This approach is effective when the aim is to understand how and why a phenomenon occurs from the participants' perspective (Gerson & Damaske, 2020; Lim, 2024). An open-ended approach allows participants to freely discuss topics they found relevant within the scope of the research project (Edwards & Holland, 2023). The interview guides, found in Appendices 2 and 3, provided an overall thematic structure and were adapted for different participant groups, such as redundant workers, remaining workers, and managers, reflecting their unique perspectives and experiences of the restructuring process.

Although a semi-structured format guided the interviews, the emphasis on participants' experiences meant that the level of structure varied. Some participants required more guiding questions to support their storytelling, while others shared their stories with little intervention. This flexibility allowed participants to shape the conversation and, thus, deepened the understanding of the phenomenon (Bryman et al., 2025) while enabling the emergence of unexpected yet significant themes. For example, identity became central in Paper II despite not being explicitly addressed in the interview guide, while underemployment emerged as the main theme of Paper III.

Most interviews were conducted in Swedish, the native language of both researcher and participants. A small number were carried out in English when participants did not speak Swedish. These interviews proceeded smoothly although English was the second language for both parties, with participants encouraged to request clarification whenever needed. To minimise potential misunderstandings, the interview guide, originally developed and tested in Swedish, was translated

and tested before the first interview in English. All interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 44 and 154 minutes. Time before and after each interview was reserved for study-related information and participant questions.

Data collection spanned two years, 2020-2022, and included follow-up interviews. This design allowed preliminary analyses to be revisited and refined. For participants who took part in follow-up interviews, the time between interviews provided the opportunity for reflection, offering insights into how experiences and perceptions had evolved over time.

To ensure that participants were fully informed (Åkerman, 2024), detailed written information about the study, participants' rights and conditions for participation was provided during interview scheduling. A confirmation email with the agreed time for interview included study details and a consent form outlining their right to withdraw at any time. Before each interview, participants received oral information and were invited to ask questions. Written informed consent was then obtained. All scheduled participants took part except for one, who cancelled before the interview without explanation.

#### **4.3.1. Online interview format**

Due to pandemic-related travel restrictions, most interviews were conducted via Zoom, with Microsoft Teams as backup in cases of technical issues. Online interviews come with both advantages and disadvantages (Anthony et al., 2025; Thunberg & Arnell, 2021; Żadkowska et al., 2022). They are cost-effective, give access to participants at geographical distance, and provide flexibility in scheduling. Due to their format they remain feasible even when restrictions related to social distancing and travel are in place, as demonstrated in this specific case (cf. Thunberg & Arnell, 2021). Participants could choose when and where to join from, e.g. home, work or even a quiet café, thereby lowering the threshold for participation. This flexibility also gives participants a sense of control, which is considered one of the advantages of online interviewing (Thunberg & Arnell, 2021). A few participants needed to reschedule, which was easily done due to the absence of travel.

Online interviews also present challenges such as technical disruptions, reduced ability to read body language, and a potential sense of distance between researcher and participant (Anthony et al., 2025; Thunberg & Arnell, 2021; Żadkowska et al., 2022). Minor technical issues occurred mainly when starting up interviews, where participants needed guidance with audio or video settings. In a few instances, switching from Zoom to Teams resolved the issue. In all cases, we found solutions which allowed the interviews to be carried out successfully. To mitigate issues related to distance and body language, participants were encouraged to keep their cameras on to support interpretation of body language and to use a headset to improve sound quality.

Given the potentially emotional nature of the subject, job loss, organisational restructuring and employment security, one potential issue which was considered before conducting the interviews was how to ensure participants' wellbeing (cf. Żadkowska et al., 2022). Interviews were conducted with a listening and attentive approach, and participants were offered breaks or the option to end the interview early if needed (Żadkowska et al., 2022). Although some topics raised by participants were emotionally sensitive, such as threats of job loss, rehiring at lower hierarchical levels, or even uncertainty linked to work permits, no interviews had to be terminated earlier. However, a few participants chose to take short breaks (about a minute) to gather themselves before continuing with the interview.

Some scholars argue that online interviews can be advantageous for sensitive topics as the digital format gives participants greater control, including the option to leave at any time with just a push of a button (Thunberg & Arnell, 2021). In this study, the combination of thoughtful setup and researcher awareness helped bridge the potential distance in the digital gap. Participants often expressed trust and a feeling of being listened to, particularly those who participated in follow-up interviews, where they showed a strong willingness to continue sharing their stories.

#### **4.3.2. Conducting interviews**

Most interviews in the overall project were carried out by the author of this thesis. In early stages, however, two researchers participated in

each interview. This dual-researcher setup offered several advantages, allowing one researcher to focus entirely on engaging with the participant while the other adopted a more reflective role by taking notes, ensured coverage of all themes, and identifying questions which might need adjustment for future interviews.

At the same time, the presence of two researchers can influence power dynamics (cf. Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). To address this, roles were clearly communicated to participants, and effort was made to create a relaxed and transparent atmosphere (Alvesson, 2023). When interviews were later conducted by a single researcher, potential hierarchical dynamics were reduced but still considered (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). A humble, participant-centred approach was adopted, with each interview beginning with a description of its open-ended nature (Edwards & Holland, 2023). Participants were asked for permission to be contacted again if clarification was needed and were encouraged to reach out with additional reflections. In a few cases, follow-up questions were sent; while in others, participants independently shared additional information afterwards.

The interview topic resonated strongly with the participants who openly shared their experiences, emotions and reflections. This resulted in a rich and multifaceted dataset with potential to support multiple publications. Each paper focuses on distinct aspects of organisational restructuring and draws on interview subsets linked to whether participants remained in or exited the organisation as a restructuring outcome.

Participants associated with the five main hotels were offered the option to be interviewed during work hours. While this increased accessibility, interviews conducted at the workplace may affect feelings of openness (cf. Gerson & Damaske, 2020). To address this, participants were asked to find a quiet and private location and were invited to follow up afterwards if they wished to add anything. However, as conducting interviews in the workplace can make participation visible to managers and colleagues, and because confidentiality is a core ethical requirement in qualitative interview studies, strict anonymisation procedures were applied in the presentation of the results in the tables and

findings sections. Pseudonyms were used throughout, and only job categories were reported rather than detailed personal information.

#### 4.4. Processing of material

Empirical data from the interviews was processed and interpreted using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021) inspired by the six steps outlined in Table 1. The analysis process began already in the interview session with note-taking; this was followed by brief written reflections being documented in a reflexive journal after each interview (cf. Lim, 2024; Nowell et al., 2017). The interviews have been transcribed verbatim, partly by the author of this thesis and partly outsourced to professional transcribers. The interview transcripts were then read several times in printed form as well as during the coding process, which was both manually on paper and in NVivo.

Phase	Description of the Process
1. Familiarise yourself with your data	Transcribe data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generate initial codes	Code interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collate data relevant to each code.
3. Search for themes	Collate codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Review themes	Check if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
5. Define and name themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Produce the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

*Table 1. The Six Steps of Thematical Analysis based on description from Braun & Clarke (2006)*

The analysis unfolded in several stages. Initially, the interviews were coded into overarching themes such as Job (in)security: uncertainty and hope, Workplace relationships, and Consequences for identity. These preliminary themes were discussed within the larger research group and with the advisory board, shaping the direction for further analysis. The analysis process then evolved into sub-analyses for several papers, of which three are included in this thesis. Paper IV was later developed in the research process as new insights emerged. Revisiting the data during several occasions contributed with fresh perspectives, allowing deeper interpretations and uncovered new ways of understanding the data which for example is the case for Paper IV.

The initial phase of the analysis was inductive and data-driven, with participants' narratives at the centre. In later stages, a theoretical lens was applied to enrich the analysis and explore how relevant theoretical concepts could deepen understanding (cf. Karlsson & Bergman, 2017). One example is the iterative movement in Paper IV, whose focus emerged from a recurring theme identified early in the interviews: the discrepancies between how participants envisioned navigating working life and the reality. At that stage, the theme caught my attention, but I had not yet connected it to a suitable theoretical framework. Over time, my analytical approach and ideas about which theories could illuminate this phenomenon developed, shaped by the evolving understanding which develops throughout a PhD journey. This process aligns with the principles of reflexive thematical analysis, where analysis is not confined to the six coding steps but unfolds throughout the research and writing process (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2019). In practice, the analysis extended into the writing of the papers, with the six steps experienced as a continuous, iterative process rather than distinct stages.

To illustrate the coding process, Table 2 presents an example of the code map for one of the papers, a version of which was also published in Paper I. The table illustrates how the sub-themes relate to the main themes, and all narratives included in the paper were interpreted in relation to these codes and themes. Illustrative quotations are presented

in the findings section of Paper I, and additional examples of the coding process can be found in the respective papers.

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Main Themes</b>
Job (in)security – employment status Job (in)security – work content and duties Hopefulness and views on the future	Job (in)security; uncertainty and hope
Additional work content Workload and job pressure Introduction/training for extended work	Workload and work extension
Loss of working time Financial aspects Additional time for leisure Changes in working hours	Changes in time and financial structures
Relations with management Relations with colleagues Solitary work Role toward guests Absence of appreciation	Changes in workplace relations

*Table 2. Example of Coding Process (Rydell & Storman, 2023)*

NVivo was used to structure the material and facilitate navigation, although combining digital and manual work enhanced creativity and allowed deeper engagement with the data. This dual approach reflects the view of analysis as both an art and a science (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2015) where knowledge is co-constructed through interaction between the researcher and the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). NVivo provided a foundation for organising and coding, while the analysis was further developed through complementary practices such as sketching, writing, and discussing emerging insights with colleagues during seminars. These activities supported a more reflexive and interpretive process, allowing for a richer exploration of the participants' narratives. A reflection from working both digitally and manually is that relying solely on digital tools such as NVivo can limit the creative and interpretive

dimensions of the analysis. The interplay between structured digital work and open-ended manual exploration proved valuable when taking another step in analytical depth and flexibility.

This approach is consistent with Braun & Clarke's (2019) reflexive variant of thematic analysis, which underscores the active role of the researcher in meaning-making. Knowledge is co-constructed through the researcher's interaction with the data, shaped by their theoretical assumptions and prior understandings (cf. Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017). Recognising this, it is essential to be transparent about the researcher's background, perspective, and preunderstandings as these can inevitably influence both data interpretation and knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021). A brief description of the researcher's background is therefore provided below, in line with recommendations on how to achieve a reflexive approach (Nowell et al., 2017).

#### **4.4.1. Reflexivity and potential researcher bias**

With a background as a former HR professional, I have often found myself at the intersection of workers' and managers' interests. This dual perspective has influenced my approach to studying workers' perspectives. My HR experience has given me an understanding of organisational dynamics, policies and challenges faced by both workers and managers. This has helped me to identify themes related to e.g. workplace communication, job satisfaction, and work environmental issues within the data.

Having previously worked in various service roles, including as a cashier, customer service representative, guide and cleaner, I bring first-hand understanding of workers' experiences. These experiences have helped me stay empathetic and grounded in my research, as I have personally experienced aspects of the working life I study. While my HR background helps me conceptualise findings within broader organisational context, my personal experience as a worker helps me stay attuned to the experiences of those I study. Now, in my current role as a PhD candidate, I continue to carry these perspectives with me, shaping how I interpret and engage with my research and understand my data.

However, I am aware that my dual role might come with biases. To mitigate this, I have engaged in reflexive practises aimed at challenging and reflecting on potential assumption which could influence the research process (cf. Byrne, 2022). In this thesis, reflexivity has been fostered through presenting and discussing the interpretation of the data at several academic conferences, seminars and together with supervisors and co-authors. In addition, results have been validated through discussions with representatives from the studied sector, including the advisory board, and in presentations for practitioners.

The first three papers were produced in a co-authorship with colleagues from different academic backgrounds, which further supported reflexivity through collaborative interpretation of the data. For the final single authored paper, I aimed to maintain reflexivity by discussing the manuscript with supervisors, presenting a draft at an academic conference, and engaging in discussions with colleagues both in structured seminars and informal settings such as by the coffee machine. I also dedicated time specifically to reflect on these issues. Throughout the research process, I kept a research diary (Nadin & Cassell, 2006), documenting notes and reflections during and after interviews, as well as throughout the analysis and writing phases. This practice helped me critically reflect on my assumptions, track the evolution of my interpretations, and revisit my notes to reflect on my line of thinking when needed.

#### **4.5. A critical reflection on the method**

As with all intensive case study research, the statistical generalisability of the findings is limited (Yin, 2018). However, case studies do enable analytical generalisation, where the contribution lies in expanding, refining, or challenging existing theoretical statements. From this perspective, the findings may be theoretically generalisable to broader concepts or mechanisms (Yin, 2018).

The interview-based design also has its limitations. While interviews provided rich and detailed data into workers' experiences, they captured narratives at a specific point in time and are shaped by what participants choose to share or omit (Gerson & Damaske, 2020). This means that certain dimensions of restructuring, particularly those

which unfold gradually or appear in everyday practices, may be lost or only partially captured.

Participant observations (cf. Bryman et al., 2025) could have offered a additional insight into how individuals act and interact during organisational restructuring. However, such an approach would also have been limited in important ways. Observations conducted in the workplace would primarily have captured workers' behaviour while at work, yet many of the challenges during the restructuring, particularly during periods of STW, occurred outside the physical workplace. Since workers were often home when they experienced uncertainty, isolation or reduced social contact, observational methods would likely have missed central aspects of their experiences, if not combined with interviews.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic made workplace-based observations particularly difficult due to travel restrictions and social distancing measures. Even beyond the pandemic context, gaining access to organisations during sensitive restructuring phases can be challenging as such situations often involve confidential or emotionally charged processes which are difficult to access as external researchers (Bryman et al., 2025).

Given these constraints, interviews remain a suitable and valuable tool for capturing subjective experiences, including those shaped by circumstances outside the workplace. Nevertheless, future research could complement interviews with observational methods where feasible, particularly to explore dimensions of restructuring which are embedded in everyday practices and interactions. Such a combined approach may reveal elements which may be lost or only partially conveyed through interviews.

#### **4.6. Declaration about the use of generative AI**

When I began working on this thesis, generative AI tools such as Copilot and ChatGPT were not widely available. For the majority of my PhD journey, including Papers I, II and III, I therefore relied on professional language reviewers to improve grammar, clarity and coherence after drafts were completed. In later stages, Paper IV and writing this thesis,

I used the AI-assisted Copilot (MS 365, 2025) in the final stages as support for language checks aimed at improve grammar, sentence structure and, occasionally, suggest alternative phrasing or translate sentences from Swedish to English. This use is comparable to the support earlier provided by professional language reviewers. These tools were not used to generate original content, which means that all ideas, interpretations, and critical reasoning are my own. Copilot has never been used to check the language of the entire text or large text sections, but was applied occasionally to paragraphs to support clarity in English. The AI-assisted language support was complemented by the work of a professional language reviewer in the final stage of both the thesis and Paper IV.

I approached AI use with caution, aware of the risks such as inaccuracies, bias, and data security concerns. To mitigate these, I used only university-licensed versions, ensuring that processed material was not stored or used for model training. No data were shared with any AI-assisted tool. AI served solely as a tool to improve expression and communication quality, and I am solely responsibility for all content.

In the following section, a summary of the findings from the empirical studies will be presented.

## **5. Summary of the research papers**

This section provides a summary of the main findings from the four empirical papers. The first two papers examine the experiences and consequences for workers who remained in the organisations and who were directly affected by the implementation of STW schemes during organisational restructuring. The latter two papers focus on experiences of job loss and job transitions under these conditions.

### **Paper I: Short-time Work, Redundancies, and Changing Work Environment: The Hospitality Sector During COVID-19.**

The aim of this paper was to examine how STW schemes and redundancies affected the psychosocial work environment in the Swedish hotel sector. The focus was on workers who experienced temporarily reduced working hours and income under extensive STW implementation. The study aimed to fill a gap in organisational restructuring literature by exploring the effects of restructuring involving STW implementation on work conditions and well-being. The data were based on 36 interviews with workers and managers from three hotels in Sweden which implemented STW schemes, where some workers were also made redundant.

### **Main findings**

The results show that the work environment underwent significant changes due to the rather long period of government restrictions, radical fluctuations in hotel occupancy rates, and the implementation of STW schemes combined with large-scale downsizing. The experienced changes can be summarised into four categories: job (in)security; workload and work extension; time and financial structures; and workplace relations. Workers experienced fluctuating job insecurity, both in terms of employment stability and changes to job content. Reduced working hours resulted in heavier workloads and new work tasks, often without proper training, which caused stress and physical strain. The STW arrangements also altered time and financial structures; while some workers appreciated the extra leisure time, others felt isolated and anxious due to income loss, and irregular and unpredictable schedules. Workplace relations were affected as increased solitary work, reduced and changed guest interaction, and organisational changes

sometimes led to tension, although this also improved cross-departmental collaboration.

The use STW also contributed to the disruption of systematic work environment processes. As individual working hours were reduced, opportunities for collective workplace meetings and discussions about potential work environment risks were limited. This fragmentation of time and presence at the workplace made it more difficult to uphold systematic work environment practises and to provide proper introduction to new tasks.

### **Contribution to the thesis and literature**

This paper contributes to restructuring literature by highlighting the unique position of workers placed on extensive STW schemes, those who do not neatly fit into the categories of either ‘*Survivors*’ or ‘*Victims*’ (cf. Devine et al., 2003). Their work roles are significantly altered during restructuring, challenging existing frameworks for understanding consequences for workers. This suggests that workers on STW might share the characteristics of ‘*Endurers*’ (McLachlan et al., 2021) as their experiences are based on a situation where they succeed in retaining their employment but experience major changes in their work roles. It also shows how extensive STW implementation introduced some consequences typically associated with job loss, such as reduced social interaction and decreased income. The study emphasises the dual nature of STW schemes; while they help preserve jobs, they also introduce new forms of insecurity. This highlights the importance of considering psychosocial risk factors and the role of social support when evaluating the effectiveness of STW schemes. It also points to the uneven impact of organisational restructuring involving STW, particularly for entry-level jobs and workers with low wages where the financial effects of STW implementation can have larger consequences. The paper contributes to the thesis with an understanding of the unintended consequences for workers directly affected by the implementation of STW schemes (Cahuc, 2024), with a focus on their work environment.

## **Paper II: Work Identities and Changed Work Roles in Times of Crises: A Study of Hospitality Workers During Restructuring.**

The study's aim was to examine how restructuring of hotel work affects work identities and perceived attractiveness of work. It was based on 29 semi-structured interviews with hotel staff at three hotels in Sweden which had undergone organisational restructuring that involved implementation of STW and the reorganisation of work roles.

### **Main findings**

The organisational restructuring process, justified by the external crisis according to managers, introduced a more general role as 'host' which challenged the previously distinct identities connected to specific work roles. This shift caused confusion, reduced job satisfaction, and challenged workers' sense of work identity. While some workers appreciated the flexibility, many experienced a loss of pride and clarity in their roles. As STW schemes, initially perceived as a protective measure, were introduced at the same time as redundancies and reorganisation, they intensified the sense of job insecurity and made the shift to these broader work roles more prominent. Workers' abilities to adapt to new roles varied, and many expressed increased turnover intentions and doubts about opportunities for a career within the sector. The study highlights the tension between job security and preservation of work identity, showing that while changes in work roles can provide job security when being adjusted toward the new organisation (Hellgren et al., 2005), they also alter the context upon which work identity is built. This duality created dilemmas for workers and forced them to accept changes in work, upon which their identity is built, or jeopardise job security. The study also emphasises how restructuring risks affecting career opportunities, work roles, hierarchical levels, and turnover intentions.

### **Contribution to the thesis and literature**

This study contributes to the understanding of how organisational restructuring, which includes STW schemes, can have unintended consequences on workers (Cahuc, 2024) regarding, e.g., their job satisfaction and work identity. It highlights how extensive STW usage intersects with internal labour market dynamics, influencing how organisations structure their operations. In this case, roles were broadened to cover

the essential daily tasks needed to keep the organisation running with fewer workers present at the one time. This risk affected role clarity, career progression, and identity formation. The findings suggest that maintaining work identity and providing transparent career paths may support workers in feeling secure in their employment after going through organisational restructuring, and may also contribute to maintaining job satisfaction and the attractiveness of hotel work in times of crisis and beyond.

### **Paper III: Job Loss and Underemployment: A Qualitative Study from the Swedish Hotel Sector.**

The study's aim was to explore how redundant hotel workers in Sweden navigated the labour market following job loss during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on 28 interviews with redundant hotel workers from seven different hotels (drawn from the main dataset, supplemented by three participants from other hotels recruited through snowball sampling), the study focused on understanding the strategies workers employed in their transition in the liminal space between employment, underemployment, and unemployment, and the factors influencing these strategies.

#### **Main Findings**

The findings reveal that workers faced a constrained and uncertain labour market, where temporary employment was often used as a strategy to avoid unemployment. However, this frequently led to underemployment, either in terms of hours or skills (cf. Heyes & Tomlinson, 2021). Many participants experienced a mismatch between their existing skill sets and the demands of other sectors, making it difficult to translate their skill sets to a new context. Furthermore, the workers' lives and family situations influenced their navigation strategies, acting as both barriers and facilitators within the job search process, as well as shaping how they prioritised and navigated their transitions. Underemployment was also common in cases where workers were re-employed at the same organisation under the Preferential Right to Re-employment legislation. This suggests that re-employment may, in some cases, serve only as a temporary stop in the transition journey, particularly when it involves employment solutions with hourly or skill-based underemployment.

## **Contribution to the Thesis and the Literature**

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how redundant workers experienced the consequences of job loss and job transitions within a labour market which was marked by crisis responses and where STW scheme implementations indirectly affected redundant workers through the slowing down of overall mobility (cf. Giupponi & Landais, 2023). This constrained labour market meant few job openings which, in turn, led to workers in the external labour market having to accept working conditions they would not normally consider, e.g. many times being partially employed/partially unemployed. These dynamics highlight the overlapping dimension of internal and external labour markets, illustrating how workers may find themselves in a state of *Liminality*, i.e. moving in the margins of the external labour market, churning between temporary employment contracts and underemployment. The paper also contributes to the thesis by offering a nuanced perspective which builds on from the binary categorisation of employment status, employed versus unemployed (Devine et al., 2003), through a discussion and development of the concept of *Liminality*. Further, the paper contributes to the limited literature of workers transition between states of employment, underemployment and unemployment (cf. Heyes & Tomlinson, 2021) by providing empirical insights into workers' experiences, framing how their transition strategies risk leading to temporary stops, and potentially interruptions, in transitions following job loss.

## **Paper IV: Worker Perspectives on Job Mobility After Job Loss Through the Lens of Lock-in.**

The aim of this, as yet unpublished, study was to examine Swedish hotel workers' experiences of job loss and job transition through the lens of lock-in. Drawing on 28 qualitative interviews with hotel workers in Sweden, the study explored the constraints workers face during involuntary job transitions and how dimensions of lock-in (cf. Furåker, 2014) can be used to understand their reasoning about their transition.

## **Main findings**

The findings reveal that redundant hotel workers face a complex interplay of emotional, relational, and structural factors which shape their

reasoning about job mobility options. While many participants expressed dissatisfaction with previous working conditions, such as physical strain, irregular hours, and limited career prospects, they appear to remain connected to their former work context even after being made redundant. The involuntary job loss forced participants to reflect on their options for their future work life, creating a tension between the desire to transition to new employment, and potentially a new career, and a reluctance to sacrifice investments made in their previous work context. This dilemma was further navigated in a heavily constrained labour market where mobility options were perceived as limited.

The pandemic had a severe impact on the hotel sector, exposing vulnerabilities in previous relied-upon informal job search strategies and caused redundant workers to reassess their opportunities for transition. The interviews reveal a sense of lock-in among participants shaped by low levels of formal education, sector-specific skills, and perceived limitations in mobility. A contributing factor, reinforcing lock-in, was the influence of social and family contexts on decision making. Participants often prioritised geographical stability and caregiving responsibilities over broader job search opportunities, thus limiting their transitions. In addition, organisational practices during redundancy processes, such as how the redundancy process was announced and promises of future re-employment, further delayed participants' efforts to seek new jobs.

The study offers insight into the fact that the experience of being locked-in can persist even after redundancy, either connected to a previous work role or sector. Lock-in could either be perceived as beyond workers' control or as a result of weighing of alternatives when the cost of transition becomes too high, indicating the need to distinguish between a structural dimension and a preferential dimension of lock-in. In a few cases, however, redundancy served as a turning point for change, enabling transitions which had previously been avoided due to fear of failure and reluctance to give up the job security an employment contract offers. Where participants managed to break this perceived lock-in, external support, such as encouragement from others, played a key role in reframing their situation and pursuing new opportunities.

### **Contribution to the thesis and literature**

This paper contributes to the thesis by offering an understanding of constraints in transitions in the aftermath of job loss. It expands the conceptual application of lock-in (cf. Furåker et al., 2014) beyond active employment, demonstrating its relevance in a post-redundancy context. The findings highlight the importance of workers' own voices in shaping mobility narratives and show how lock-in is not a static condition but, rather, a dynamic process influenced by perception, context, and agency.

The study contributes to the literature on workers' perspectives of job transition (cf. MacKenzie et al., 2025) by integrating different dimensions of lock-in: structural and preferential. This means that lock-in emerges not only when workers perceive they have no options for transitions, it also reflects a worker's personal assessment of what sacrifices are acceptable and when the cost of transition becomes too high. Although this paper does not directly examine STW schemes, it addresses a labour market context in which STW contributes to constraints on job mobility. Furthermore, the paper complements the thesis by exploring why workers, previously employed in work roles characterised by precarious conditions which were often perceived as less desirable, continue to seek re-entry into such employment following job loss. This reasoning highlights how the perceived safety of familiar roles can outweigh aspirations for mobility, even when such roles are marked by structural vulnerability and limited long-term prospects.

### **Overall themes through the papers**

Together, these studies offer a multifaced perspective on workers' experiences of organisational restructuring within the hotel sector, spanning changes in active employment, identity shifts, job loss, and post-redundancy transitions. By focusing on workers' own voices and experiences, the papers collectively address an overall research gap in the qualitative understanding of how individuals (in the hotel sector) navigate involuntary change in work situations (cf. Baum et al., 2016; MacKenzie et al., 2025). Further, the papers contribute to the limited body of knowledge on how STW schemes are experienced by workers at the micro level (Cahuc, 2024). Beyond their shared contribution, each

paper offers their own theoretical and empirical insights which further enrich the literature on organisational restructuring and involuntary job transitions.

## **6. Findings and discussion**

This chapter begins by presenting the Job Transition Model, developed and informed by the theoretical framework of this thesis together with empirical insights. The model serves as both a visual and analytical tool, applied here to understand job transitions in the context of organisational restructuring. Following this introduction, the discussion then examines unintended consequences of organisational restructuring which involve STW implementation beyond the primary goal of job retention. It then analyses the consequences of organisational restructuring within the internal labour market, the external labour market, and the overlapping dimension between the two. Together, these sections deepen the analysis by integrating findings across labour markets, illustrating the broader implications of organisational restructuring, and concluding with a discussion about how restructuring outcomes are also influenced by workers' life circumstances.

### **6.1. The Job Transition Model**

The Job Transition Model is an analytical model designed to visualise how workers navigate job transitions, applied here to the context of organisational restructuring. The model functions as a visual model of potential pathways, both internal transitions within the organisation and external movements across the external labour market, and connects these transitions to expected restructuring outcomes identified in previous research and in this study. By integrating the theoretical framework of this thesis with findings from the four empirical papers, the model deepens the understanding of how workers move between different labour market statuses and highlights how these movements are linked to various consequences encountered along the way. The model can also be expanded with an optional component (on the right-hand side of Figure 1) which illustrates how extensive STW implementation shapes these experiences.

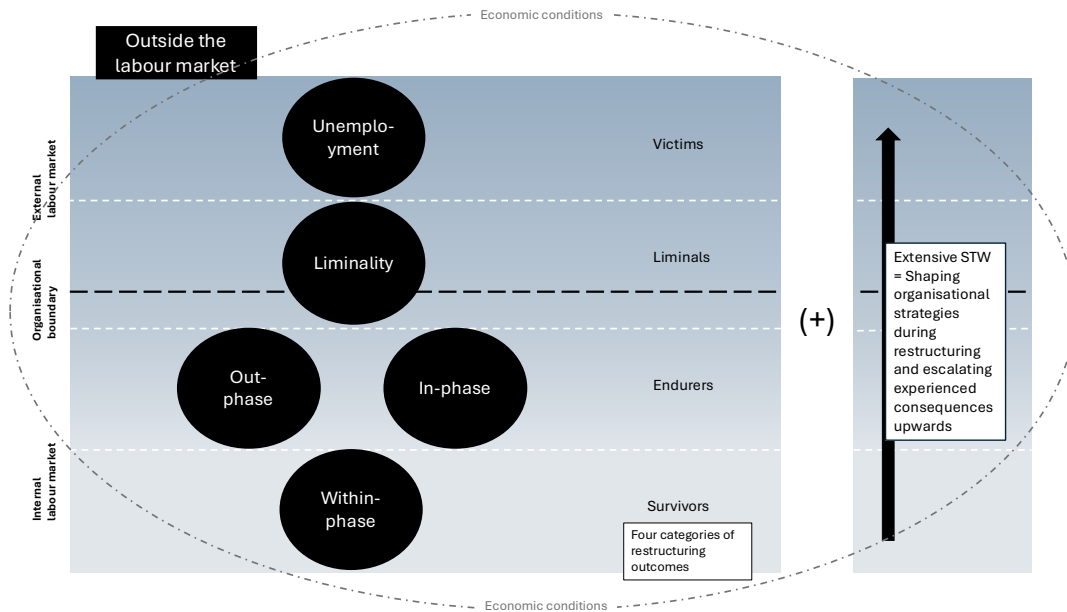


Figure 1. The Job Transition Model

The model encompasses both internal and external labour markets, capturing different labour market statuses from the perspective of workers' potential transitions. Its starting point is the binary categorisation of workers being either employed or unemployed (cf. Devine et al., 2003), i.e. within the internal or within the external labour market. However, this model builds on from this dichotomy by dividing these labour markets into multiple dimensions.

- Internal labour market: divided into the dimensions of *In-phase*, *Within-phase* and *Out-phase*, capturing workforce movement within organisations as elaborated on by Wallo et al. (2016). It should be seen as a labour market of its own; however, not as a closed system as argued by traditional internal labour market theories (cf. Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Lee, 2015), but rather interconnected with the broader labour market.
- External labour market: divided into the dimensions of *Unemployment* and *Liminality*, a transitional state which foremost is situated in the external labour market but also spans over organisational boundaries into the internal labour market. In this thesis *Liminality* is used to capture the ambiguous labour market positions where the boundaries between the internal and external labour market are blurred. This is where workers experience elements of both being within and outside the internal labour

market such as underemployment (Beck et al., 2025; Feldman, 1996), job churning (Worth, 2005), or permanent temporariness (Gonäs & Westin, 1993), which do not fit neatly into the employed/unemployed dichotomy [Paper III].

The dimensions are connected to restructuring outcomes and expected consequences such as changes in job security, working conditions, career development, and well-being (cf. Brand, 2015; Langster & Cutrer, 2021). These are grouped into three overall categories, retrieved from restructuring literature: *Victims* (Bennett et al., 1995), *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021), *Survivors* (Brockner et al., 1987), all reflecting varying degrees of restructuring impact. Building on the empirical findings of this study, a fourth category of workers is introduced throughout the discussion section: *Liminals*.

By also lifting STW into the model, it illustrates how STW can shape organisational restructuring strategies which, in turn, influence restructuring outcomes. All of this is embedded within a broader framework, represented in the model as the economic conditions.

#### **6.1.1. Examples of workers' pathways within the Job Transition Model**

Within the study, all participants initially operated within the internal labour market, specifically in the *Within-phase*, before restructuring leads them to different paths across the dimensions outlined in the model, resulting in various restructuring outcomes.

Workers who remain within the internal labour market may remain in their current position, resulting in no further change. They thus stay in the *Within-phase*, making them *Survivors* (Brockner et al., 1987). However, in cases where they transition into a new role within the organisation, it makes them *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021). For *Endurers*, the internal transition places them in the *In-phase* which requires adaptation to new routines, procedures, and sometimes the acquisitions of additional skills. In effect, they become 'new at work' despite remaining in the same workplace.

By contrast, workers who receive notice of redundancy enter the *Out-phase* which spans the notice period and continues until they transition to the external labour market. In the studied case, this phase could be lengthy with notice periods lasting up to six months and, as observed, sometimes extended due to temporary staffing needs. For some workers, these extensions allowed continued employment, while for others the extension merely prolonged an uncertain *Out-phase* before eventually transitioning to the external labour market where, based on previous research, they would be categorised as *Victims* (Bennett et al., 1995). In certain cases, redundancy also prompted direct transitions from the *Out-phase* to the box ‘outside the labour market’ as seen when workers opted for early retirement after being made redundant.

What the empirical findings of this thesis indicate is that there is a need to refine and subdivide the category of *Victims* (Bennett et al., 1995) based on the observed consequences of workers transitioning to a liminal space. This warrants the introduction of a fourth category of restructuring outcomes, *Liminals* which describes workers who, post-restructuring, experience consequences that combine elements of both *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021) and *Victims* (Bennett et al., 1995). Similar to the rationale for introducing *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021), the argument for *Liminals* rests on the observation that existing categories fail to adequately represent these workers.

*Liminals* occupy a labour market position which overlaps both internal and external labour market statuses. *Liminals* retain or regain partial labour market attachment but under conditions which limit job security, income security, and career progression. Understanding their transitions requires applying ideas from restructuring studies which focus both on the internal as well as the external labour markets. This dual perspective helps explain how workers navigate restructuring in back-and-forth movements between different dimensions including patterns of prolonged insecurity and constrained mobility, such as underemployment in terms of hours and skill (Beck et al., 2025; Feldman, 1996), job churning (cf. Worth, 2005), or permanent temporariness (Gonäs & Westin, 1993). The introduction of the *Liminal* category expands the conceptual framework for restructuring outcomes analysis. It highlights the need to move beyond binary classifications (cf. Devine

et al., 2003) and to recognise hybrid states which better capture the complexity of navigating contemporary labour markets, where the boundaries between internal and external labour markets are becoming increasingly blurred (Lee, 2015; MacKenzie & McLachlan, 2023).

To return to the voices in the introduction of the thesis, Rose-Mary and Andreas, they provide two examples of how workers can move through several dimensions of the Job Transition Model.

Rose-Mary, made redundant from her role as restaurant team leader, moved from the *Within-phase* in the internal labour market to the *Out-phase* during her notice period, and then into the external labour market after her two months' notice period. Her transition was marked by temporary jobs, often characterised by underemployment in which she perceived limited opportunities to utilise her skills and available hours, placing her in the category *Liminal*. She alternated between short and sometimes hour-based contracts but also visited the *Unemployment* dimension and faced consequences linked to the category *Victims* (Bennett et al., 1995). At the time of her second interview, two years after notice of redundancy, she had crossed the organisational boundary back into the internal labour market via a permanent full-time position with an expanded team leader role involving both reception and restaurant work. Although the transition led to re-employment at her previous workplace, it left her with a diminished sense of job security where she keeps her CV updated and makes sure to have a back-up plan. In terms of restructuring outcomes, she moved through categories of *Victim* (Bennett et al., 1995), *Liminal*, and *Endurer* (McLachlan et al., 2021).

Andreas, on the other hand, spent a longer time in *Liminality*. After almost 20 years with the same employer, his notice period kept him in the *Out-phase* for six months before he entered the external labour market. Despite his extensive experience, including staff responsibility and project coordination, he faced intense competition, struggled to transfer his skills beyond the sector, and was further limited by geographical constraints linked to caring for his teenage daughter. Although he briefly entered the *Unemployment* dimension, most of his transition involved temporary, part-time work where he did not utilise

his skills or available hours. Despite the structural nature of his redundancy, he experienced a sense of shame and personal failure in having to step down to a position he perceived as on a lower hierarchical level than his previous position. At the time of his interview, he was employed 75 % as a shop assistant, while continuing to search for roles aligned with his skills and to meet unemployment insurance requirements. This meant that Andreas has experienced the consequences associated with *Victims* (Bennett et al., 1995) and *Liminals* as, in his role as a shop assistant, he has partial attachment to the internal labour market of his new organisation while still keeping one foot in the external labour market through ongoing job search activities.

These two transition examples illustrate how workers may move through multiple dimensions of the Job Transition Model, shifting between the internal and external labour markets, and encountering different restructuring outcomes over time.

### ***6.1.2. Applying the STW-component to the Job Transition Model***

As this thesis includes unintended consequences of STW during restructuring, the optional STW component is applied to the model. It illustrates how extensive use of STW can shape workers' experiences of restructuring and alter the consequences they face, possibly disturbing the categorisation of restructuring outcomes connected to internal versus external labour market statuses.

Although introduced as an important emergency measure to preserve employment (Müller et al., 2022), the empirical studies in this thesis show that STW also produced unintended consequences such as fragmented and unpredictable work schedules, prolonged uncertainty and limited mobility, conditions which were observed in both labour markets. Extensive STW use also reshaped work organisation by narrowing tasks to what deemed critical with effects extended beyond the organisation itself. Workers who transitioned to the external labour market faced reduced job openings and disrupted job searches, partly linked to fluctuating STW levels. Thus, STW influenced not only immediate employment stability but also workers' transitions across the broader labour market.

Guided by the Job Transition Model, the discussion invites closer examination of workers' experiences across these interconnected labour market dimensions. The next subsection turns to the internal labour market.

## **6.2. Internal labour market transitions**

As discussed above, the internal labour market is conceptualised as containing the *Within-phase*, the *In-phase* and the *Out-phase*, inspired by Wallo et al.'s (2016) framework of workforce movement. This section begins with the first two phases before turning to a discussion of the *Out-phase*.

### **6.2.1. The *Within-phase* and *In-phase* in the internal labour market**

When demand collapsed during the pandemic, the studied hotels reduced their staff by up to 80 %. As labour needs continued to fall, extensive use of STW followed with remaining workers working as little as 20 % of their regular hours [Paper I]. This led to the reorganisation of work, broadening of work roles, and the prioritisation of critical work tasks. As a result, workers were reallocated to areas of greatest need [Paper I and Paper II] with each worker being required to perform a wider range of tasks and, thus, increasing the demand for individual flexibility.

These developments reflect a dual strategy: rapid downsizing strategies for immediate cost savings (cf. Hellgren et al., 1999; McLachlan et al., 2021) combined with work role and schedule adjustments (cf. Gandolfi, 2013; Johnstone, 2023). Together, these strategies impacted both quantitative and qualitative job security (cf. Hellgren et al., 1999) as employment contracts and role clarity were repeatedly destabilised and threatened. Translated into the conceptual framework of this thesis, this reclassification positioned all remaining workers, previously understood as potential *Survivors*, as *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021) as the implementation of extensive STW schemes brought significant changes to their work situations. In other words, they more or less transitioned from the *Within-phase* to the *In-phase* where they were required to adapt to new work roles and corresponding obligations.

The expansion of work roles had significant implications for internal career development [Paper II]. Flattened organisational hierarchies disrupted traditional career pathways, reducing opportunities for formal advancement and specialisation. Moreover, the ambiguity surrounding the broader roles made it increasingly difficult for workers to envision their future within the organisation. This stands in contrast to previous research highlighting the importance of clear communication and well-defined career paths to reduce uncertainty and prevent staff turnover during organisational restructuring (cf. Bergström & Arman, 2017; Brockner, 1992). The changed work roles [Paper I and Paper II] negatively affected how workers viewed job attractiveness, their work identity, and so increased turnover intentions [Paper II].

Whether such extensive work reorganisation is inherent to all STW implementation is debatable, but the potential risk associated with these changes should not be underestimated. While STW is an important measure to safeguard jobs by reducing redundancies, rapid and extensive implementation may negatively affect the work environment. Workers had limited opportunities to engage in or benefit from thorough risk assessments during changing STW levels [Paper I], while reduced working hours led to fewer staff meetings and diminished workplace interactions. This deprioritised onboarding for new work roles and hampered the identification of risks linked to organisational change [Paper I]. It is important to remember that workers in this study were required to work on-site and could not perform their tasks remotely. When working hours were spread out to meet operational needs, workers on extensive STW were rarely present at the workplace simultaneously. This limited opportunities for social interaction as well as chances to receive an introduction to new tasks or share experiences.

In practice, this meant that workers carried the burden of adapting to new work conditions, managing emerging risks, and changing roles with limited support and preparation. Such experiences diverge from recommendations which emphasise actively guiding workers into their new roles after restructuring to reduce stress and other negative effects (Amundson et al., 2004; Boyd et al., 2014). Solitary work became more common, particularly during periods of extensive STW. Previous

studies in the retail sector show that restructuring can increase solitary work and that employer-controlled flexible schedules may intensify feelings of isolation (Arman et al., 2021). Reduced opportunities for interaction weaken the development of a collective voice (Arman et al., 2021), a pattern also mirrored in this study. Here, the collective voice was hindered not only by mass redundancies, resulting in the loss of both workers and local union representatives, but also by the organisation of work during periods of extensive STW. These findings suggest that even temporary increases in solitary work, resulting from employer-controlled flexible schedules through extensive STW, may produce effects similar to more permanent forms of work isolation.

Beyond its implications for worker interaction, STW also appears to have unintended consequences for the work environment. Previous research shows that organisational restructuring tends to negatively impact worker wellbeing (de Jong et al., 2016) and that work environment risks may be overlooked during such periods (cf. Flovik et al., 2019). This study further shows how reduced interaction affects the work environment on multiple levels including limiting opportunities to engage in systematic work environment practices, an issue of particular relevance for psychosocial risk management.

Moreover, during economic downturns triggered by health-related crises, organisations often shift their focus toward immediate operational survival and preventing the spread of illness (Stenfors et al., 2024). As a result, long-term concerns such as workers' psychosocial wellbeing and attention to psychosocial factors may be further deprioritised. The study shows that such shifts, combined with reduced social interaction, can weaken the effectiveness of work environment management during STW implementation. In line with earlier arguments, recognising all remaining workers as *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021) highlights their distinct experiences and support needs in comparison to *Survivors* (Brockner et al., 1987). Extensive STW, particularly when involving substantial changes to the work context, may therefore require targeted attention from HR and the organisation when workers, through these changes, are moving through the *In-phase* to learn their new role. Such targeted attention can mitigate negative consequences for

workers such as stress, reduced career mobility, and work environment risks.

While the discussion this far has focused on the consequences within the workplace, it should also be acknowledged that STW schemes have implications beyond the workplace. A notable effect of extensive STW is increased leisure time [Paper I]. For some workers, this time provided a rare opportunity to reconnect with family, pursue hobbies, or recover from the demanding pace of work in the hotel sector which all contributed to a sense of balance and enhanced well-being. For others, however, the increase in leisure time was experienced as unsettling. The absence of structure or clear expectations made days feel long and purposeless, with fluctuating schedules and persistent job insecurity turning leisure into passive waiting. Moreover, for socially isolated workers, reduced hours also meant fewer social interactions and so intensified feelings of loneliness.

Importantly, these reactions unfolded within a broader pandemic context of societal restrictions and reduced social contact, meaning that experiences of isolation and emotional strain were widespread and not limited to workers on STW. Nevertheless, STW arrangements appeared to amplify these effects for some workers by adding employment uncertainty and reducing workplace-based interaction which had previously been part of their daily routine.

Since the publication of Paper I in 2023, this duality in experiences of STW has been confirmed by Zabel et al. (2025) who demonstrates that STW may affect job insecurity and create financial stress. By empirically linking changes in working hours to workers' experiences outside the workplace, the thesis contributes to STW literature by showing how STW not only reshapes the work environment but also intrudes into workers' private spheres. In this way, the potential benefits of increased leisure time may be undermined by uncertainty regarding employment continuity and income stability.

Differences in how workers perceived the extra leisure time were shaped by workers' life and family circumstances [Paper I], with several consequences resembling those identified in previous job loss

studies including loss of structure, reduced social contact, and diminished sense of purpose (cf. Brand, 2015; Devine et al., 2003; Jahoda, 1982). By demonstrating that such dynamics can emerge under conditions of temporarily reduced working hours, this study extends insights from job loss research into the context of active employment under STW schemes. We will return to this discussion when addressing the overlaps between the internal and external labour markets.

### **6.2.2. *The Out-phase in the internal labour market***

Moving beyond the *Within-phase* and *In-phase*, yet still remaining in the internal labour market, we now turn to the *Out-phase*. This phase includes the many workers who spent time here on their way to transitioning out of the organisation and into the external labour market. Notice periods varied between two weeks to six months. At times, these periods were extended due to temporary improvements in the economic situation, generating short-term staffing needs [Paper IV]. Organisational representatives described these extensions as attempts to ‘ride out the storm’, while hesitating to fully revoke the redundancies. As a result, some workers remained employed longer than initially anticipated, while others experienced a prolonged and uncertain *Out-phase* before eventually exiting the organisation.

This phase is an example where the organisational boundary becomes blurred as workers mentally prepare to exit the organisation. This process was further reinforced by reduced working hours through STW which heightened the ambiguity surrounding whether workers felt attached or detached from the organisation depending on how the restructuring ultimately unfolded. These findings complicate earlier research which highlights the benefits of long notice periods in facilitating adjustment and preparation for transitions (Rydell & Wigblad, 2012). Rather than providing clarity and time for planning, repeatedly extended notice periods generated uncertainty regarding whether job loss would actually occur. This ambiguity risked delaying transition processes and created a prolonged sense of insecurity, complicating both emotional coping and practical planning for the future.

However, the unintended consequences of STW extend beyond organisational boundaries. Workers who ultimately transitioned into the

external labour market faced a constrained labour market with limited opportunities for mobility and diminished prospects of re-employment, conditions partly shaped by widespread STW use [Paper III and Paper IV]. As such, while previous sections have focused on *Survivors* (Brockner et al., 1987) and *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021) within the organisation, the following section shifts the attention to the experiences of *Victims* (Bennett et al., 1995) and *Liminals*.

### **6.3. External labour market transitions**

While the unintended effects of STW schemes on the internal labour market are clearly evident in the data, the impact on the external labour market is more complex and harder to isolate as it intersects with other potential causal factors. Nevertheless, this thesis maintains its focus on perceived consequences from the workers' perspectives when shifting the analysis from the internal to the external labour market. This qualitative lens is complemented by findings from other quantitative studies which support the interpretations presented.

Research shows that job loss during economic downturns often leads to longer transitions before comparable employment is secured (Cederlöf, 2024) and often involves periods of labour market churn (MacKenzie et al., 2025). Cahuc (2019) argues that implementation of STW tends to slow down mobility within the labour market, making it more difficult for redundant workers to secure employment. These patterns are all reflected in this study, where fluctuating STW levels were closely associated with workers' perceptions of broader labour market instability and so shaped mobility intentions [Paper I and Paper II].

High STW levels were often interpreted as signals of limited opportunities, discouraging job changes among workers already employed. Some participants even expressed reluctance to pursue new employment opportunities, despite a desire to do so, due to concerns about securing new employment in a constrained labour market which contributed to lock-in effects (cf. Furåker et al., 2014). These findings align with Giupponi and Landais (2023) who argue that STW may hinder mobility and even lead to inefficient labour hoarding when applied for extended periods. This thesis contributes with qualitative insights into workers' reasoning, illustrating how organisational decisions during

restructuring, such as the use of STW, shape workers' perceptions of mobility.

Importantly, this means that internal restructuring initiatives produced unintended consequences which extended beyond the organisation and illustrates how the internal and external labour markets influence each other (cf. Lee, 2015). Although STW helped avoid redundancies, its implementation occurred within a context of high uncertainty and this broader climate of unpredictability made it difficult for both workers and managers to foresee how the crisis would develop. One worker describes the dramatic fluctuations in demand, from empty hotels to fully booked, as being 'like a rollercoaster ride' [Paper I]. These fluctuations complicated future planning and delayed rehiring, creating periods of intense workload within the organisation [Paper I and Paper II], while workers outside the organisation faced significant challenges in securing employment [Paper III].

During recovery periods when hotels experienced higher demand, organisations with STW schemes tended to restore hours for existing staff before rehiring laid-off worker or recruit new ones. Such practises created additional barriers for redundant workers seeking re-entry, and also reflects the notion pointed out by Cahuc (2019) who argues that implementation of STW may reinforce the insider-outsider divide and its inherent consequences. While STW protected workers within the organisation, this study's findings suggest that STW may also make it more difficult for redundant workers to secure employment of comparable quality [Paper III].

Many of the workers did temporarily or permanently return to their previous workplace after job loss. Some were rehired within nine months after job loss under the Preferential Right to Re-employment legislation (SFS, 1982:20) but they often faced significant changes to their employment conditions. Instead of returning to their previous full-time roles, many were re-employed in positions which involved broader work tasks, as illustrated in Paper I, but with fewer guaranteed hours. In some cases, these workers could be considered *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021), meaning they were rehired into a new role with slightly less favourable working conditions. However, in other

cases, workers were offered significantly fewer hours and, for some who returned after the nine-month period, even hourly contracts. Depending on their employment conditions, these workers should instead be categorised as *Liminals*, with one foot in the internal labour market and the other in the external labour market. In this state, workers retained some benefits of employment when they temporarily returned to employment, but simultaneously experienced the disadvantage and insecurity associated with external labour market. These patterns further illustrate how the restructuring process contributed to the ongoing blurring of boundaries between the internal and external labour markets, a trend discussed in prior research (Grimshaw et al., 2001; Lee, 2015)

Arman et al. (2021) point out how reduced working hours combined with employer-controlled flexible scheduling can intensify internal competition among workers. This was also evident in the study's findings, particularly among redundant workers who returned under hourly schedules (zero-hour contracts) or part-time arrangements. The consequences could be severe, as illustrated by this worker's account: after being made redundant from a full-time position, he was later offered only a 50 % contract. The reduced income meant he no longer met the minimum earnings required to keep his Swedish work permit, leaving both his legal status and everyday life at risk [Paper 1].

Workers who lost their jobs would typically be categorised as *Victims* (Bennett et al., 1995), i.e. redundant workers who are exposed to the consequences of job loss which often have impact on health, finances, and social relations (Brand, 2015; Gonäs et al., 2006). However, the transitions observed in this study challenge this categorisation as redundant workers' transitions did not form a homogeneous pattern. Some participants clearly aligned with the *Victims* profile (cf. Bennett et al., 1995), struggling to secure new employment and facing prolonged periods of unemployment, being placed far up on the *Victims* scale within the *Unemployment* dimension. For most, however, the transitions were more complex. While the majority secured some form of employment during the circa 27 months of the study, their transitions were marked by significant constraints rather than straightforward mobility, echoing patterns of job churning identified in earlier

studies (MacKenzie et al., 2025; Worth, 2005). Workers moved across multiple dimensions of the external labour market, experiencing periods of *Unemployment* and extended periods of *Liminality* [Paper III] i.e. situations in which they were partly employed and partly unemployed while seeking additional hours.

These constrained movements reflected the broader context: a labour market shaped by crisis responses and limited job openings in the hotel sector [Paper III and Paper IV]. While many participants succeeded in avoiding unemployment, their transitions following job loss often involved temporary or part time contracts. Consequently, even when re-employed, workers often faced underemployment (Beck et al., 2025) either in terms of hours or skill utilisation [Paper III]. This demonstrated that re-entry into employment did not necessarily translate into stability or quality, underscoring the diversity and precariousness of transitions following job loss.

As elaborated in Paper III, it is important to recognise the nuanced states which exist between the extremes of stable, permanent employment and unemployment (cf. Davies & Esseveld, 1989; Gonäs & Westin, 1993). Conditions such as hourly or skill-based underemployment exemplify these intermediate positions, which the concept *Liminality* helps capture. In such states, workers retain some benefits of employment yet lack sufficient hours or opportunities to fully utilise their capacity (Heyes & Tomlinson, 2021). Paper III also shows that opportunities emerging within the liminal space can act as temporary distractions in transition and so increase the risk of prolonged transitions.

Room to navigate transitions is influenced both by labour market conditions and a worker's ability to act within them (cf. MacKenzie et al., 2025). This interaction is reflected in Paper III where workers' ability to translate their skill set into new contexts is central. In the hotel sector, skill development is often informal (Cassel et al., 2018), limiting transferability and making workers vulnerable to what, before the crisis, was an unrecognised form of lock-in among many workers, making them locked into their sector [Paper IV]. These vulnerabilities became visible for workers during the crisis after been masked by the sector's long-standing high labour demand and staff mobility (cf. Visita,

2022b). Workers struggled to move beyond their previous positions partly due to relatively low formal education and reliance on informal skill development. As a result, many returned to the same sector or even the same employer, even when they viewed aspects of their former jobs as undesirable [Paper IV].

Their transitions were constrained by a combination structural and preferential lock-in [Paper IV]. Structural lock-in stemmed from labour market conditions and regional employment opportunities which did not align with their skill sets (cf. Furåker et al., 2014). However, lock-in also reflected workers' own prioritises during transition, such as opting for stability or to safeguard family circumstances and responsibilities which influenced decision-making and limited mobility. These overlapping lock-in mechanisms made it difficult for workers to break away from their previous trajectories. Although support structures existed through collective agreements which could have facilitated mobility (McLachlan et al., 2022), participants rarely made use of them [Paper IV].

Perceptions of mobility was further shaped by workers' broader life circumstances [Paper III and Paper IV]. These circumstances operated both as enablers and constraints and were prominent across narratives from workers who remained in employment as well as those who were made redundant. For this reason, they will be revisited in the second part of the next section.

#### **6.4. Overlapping experiences of the internal and external labour markets**

While previous research often separates restructuring consequences by labour market position (cf. Devine et al., 2003), i.e. internal versus external, the findings of this study reveal some notable similarities in how workers perceive and respond to disruptions, regardless of whether they permanently lost their jobs or temporarily lost aspects of their jobs through STW.

The model developed in this thesis builds on this binary distinction by adding *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021) within the internal labour market and *Liminals* in the external one, which also expands into the

internal labour market. However, in contexts of extensive STW, workers began to display experiences traditionally associated with *Victims* (Bennett et al., 1995), especially among workers with limited support outside the workplace. While the most obvious difference lies in job security and income retention (cf. Brand, 2015), both redundant workers and workers placed on high levels of STW experienced disruptions to social interaction, daily routines, and a sense of purpose [Paper I and Paper III]. For redundant workers, these losses were abrupt and enduring as latent functions of employment, such as structure, identity, and social contacts (Jahoda, 1982), had to be rebuilt in unfamiliar settings. Similarly, workers on extensive STW, sometimes working only 20 % of their original hours, on contracts which were not always originally full-time, experienced similar disruptions.

These findings suggest that under prolonged and extensive STW use, retained workers may temporarily enter conditions usually associated with the *Liminals* category. Unlike the distinction between *Victims* (Bennett et al., 1995) and *Liminals*, this shift occurs with a departure point from the internal labour market, where *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021) and *Survivors* (Brockner et al., 1987) subjected to extensive STW may temporarily move closer to the *Liminal* category, i.e. experiencing consequences associated with both the internal and external labour markets simultaneously. This contributes to restructuring research by showing that extensive STW schemes blur established internal-external labour market boundaries, producing overlapping experiences of e.g. job insecurity, income, and disruptions of daily structure among groups previously assumed to be protected by their position in the internal labour market.

These similarities are reflected in how workers describe: 1. Temporal insecurity: workers did not know how much they would work or when, facing frequently changing work schedules which complicated everyday planning. 2. Financial insecurity: reduced salaries under STW, combined with lost tips due to restricted guest services and fewer working hours, creating significant income uncertainty. For the most precarious workers, this was severe enough to prompt lifestyle adjustment or generate anxiety about meeting basic expenses. 3. Loss of routines and social interaction: less presence at the workplace weakened social

ties and disrupted daily routines, especially for those with limited networks outside the workplace which echoes patterns documented in unemployment research (cf. Jahoda, 1982)

What these shared experiences reveal is that workers formally retained within organisational boundaries could still enter a state resembling *Liminality*. Extensive use of STW blurred the functional divide between internal and external labour market positions. Although technically being in the internal labour market, workers encountered conditions associated with external labour market status such as underemployment, weakened attachment, and reduced income. As the Swedish STW schemes lasted, although fluctuating in levels, more than 18 months, this temporary measure became long enough for these liminal conditions to become a form of the ‘new normal’ for many workers.

This empirical pattern contributed to the broader debate on the blurred boundaries between internal and external labour markets (Grimshaw et al., 2001; Lee, 2015; MacKenzie & McLachlan, 2023). Workers’ experiences demonstrate how STW can unintentionally create hybrid states of attachment which fit the outcome category *Liminals*, i.e. partially inside, partially outside, and exposed to the insecurities of both labour markets. Across both internal and external labour market positions, some individuals struggled to maintain benefits which their work had previously provided. While this pattern is well established in research on job loss and unemployment (cf. Brand, 2015), it is also evident here among workers experiencing only temporary reductions in work-related benefits. The findings thus show how extensive STW use can produce an unintended consequence: a blurring of internal-external labour market boundaries in terms of the consequences of restructuring.

#### **6.4.1 Workers’ broader life circumstances**

This section offers a final reflection on how workers’ broader life circumstances shaped their experiences of organisational restructuring. Understanding these experiences and transitions requires taking workers’ voices and reasoning into account, as personal circumstances shape both how restructuring was interpreted and navigated. Although workers act within a larger system, the labour market (cf. Wallo et al.,

2016), their agency, resources, and constraints influence how they move within and across its dimensions (Gardiner et al., 2009; Leana & Feldman, 1990), a pattern evident throughout their narratives.

Individuals with strong social networks or stable family situations were often better able to compensate for the consequences discussed in previous sections, such as disrupted routines and reduced work-related structure. For workers without this support, the struggle was more profound. Previous research highlights the role of family support in job transitions (Gush et al., 2015b), and this study shows that such support is equally relevant for workers placed on extensive STW schemes. A worker's life context thus directly shapes their capacity to respond to restructuring and shapes their transitions across both the internal and external labour markets.

For some workers, reduced working hours under STW created space to rebalance family life, partially offsetting the uncertainty and disruption which STW entailed. In contrast, workers without such support became more vulnerable, sometimes experiencing isolation, stress and in some cases heightened insecurity due to immigration status or unstable housing [Paper I]. The consequences of restructuring, therefore, extended beyond individual workers to their families and household dynamics (Brand, 2015; Gardiner et al., 2009). Across all four papers, individuals located their experiences within their wider life circumstances, such as caregiving responsibilities, financial stability, and access to social support.

Financial support from families further shaped these transitions. Workers with such resources were better equipped to handle reduced hours and income security within the internal labour market [Paper I], and redundant workers with such resources faced less immediate pressure to secure new income [Paper III]. Although STW is often described as relatively generous and having only minor financial effects (cf. Müller et al., 2022), this study reveals a more uneven reality. Workers without financial margins or family support experienced significant strain including difficulty covering basic expenses or meeting income requirements linked to immigration status [Paper I]. The loss of tips, which for some constituted an important component of their total income,

further contributed to financial vulnerability, representing a sector-specific effect which has been overlooked in previous STW research that has mainly focused on the manufacturing sector (cf. Hijzen & Venn, 2011).

Together, these findings illustrate how workers' broader life circumstances shaped their transitions when moving through the dimensions of the Job Transition Model. Factors such as financial vulnerability, family responsibilities, immigration status, and the sector's generally precarious working conditions (Baum et al., 2020) with relative low wages (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2023) and many part time and short-term contracts (Larsson, 2022a), all interacted to produce uneven restructuring outcomes. This points to the need for a more differentiated understanding of restructuring processes and highlights the unintended consequences of STW for workers with limited financial or social support.

To sum up, the findings challenge the assumption that internal labour markets provide stable protection (cf. Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Williamson et al., 1975). In practise, uncertainties persisted for workers both within the internal labour market [Paper I and Paper II] and the external labour market [Paper III and Paper IV]. Even when employment was formally retained, workers experienced disruptions which destabilised their sense of continuity and control. Overall, this discussion chapter shows how experiences of organisational restructuring complicate the traditional division between internal and external labour markets (Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Williamson et al., 1975). Disruptions typically associated with external labour market detachment also emerged among workers who were formally employed, revealing how e.g. experiences of underemployment (Beck et al., 2025; Feldman, 1996) can extend over organisational boundaries for workers in *Liminality*. Existing understandings of restructuring outcomes are also challenged by insights into how extensive STW can blur the boundaries it is intended to preserve when safeguarding employment, making experiences traditionally associated with the external labour market visible within the internal labour market. Finally, the analysis illustrates that the positions of *Survivors* (Brockner et al., 1987), *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021), *Liminals* and *Victims* (Bennett et al., 1995)

are not fixed but shift in response to changing labour market conditions and are shaped by workers' broader life situations.

## 7. Conclusion

The thesis adopted an inductive approach to examine hotel workers' experiences of organisational restructuring and job transitions across the internal labour market, the external labour market, and the liminal space between them. By integrating these different transitions, the thesis provides a broader understanding of restructuring and offers new theoretical, empirical, and practical insights into how workers experience and navigate transitions in internal and external labour markets and the (blurred) boundary between them.

A key contribution is the development of the Job Transition Model. It integrates empirical findings with theoretical perspectives on internal and external labour markets (cf. Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Lee, 2015), conceptualising them as multi-dimensional spaces. The model combines the *In*, *Within* and *Out-phases* (Wallo et al., 2016) of the internal labour market with the concept of *Liminality*, drawing on research on ambiguous labour market positions where organisational boundaries are blurred, such as underemployment (Beck et al., 2025; Feldman, 1996), job churning (Worth, 2005) or permanent temporariness (Gonäs & Westin, 1993), combined with *Unemployment* in the external labour market. Through this integration, the model challenges assumptions of clear boundaries between internal and external labour markets (Grimshaw et al., 2001; Lee, 2015; MacKenzie & McLachlan, 2023) and demonstrates how porous boundaries and liminal states emerge in practice.

This integrated perspective also advances restructuring research by refining existing outcome categories. Prior studies distinguish between *Victims* (Bennett et al., 1995), *Survivors* (Brockner et al., 1987) and more recently *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021). However, the findings demonstrate that these categories do not fully capture the heterogeneity of workers' experiences. To address this, a fourth outcome category, *Liminals*, is introduced. This category captures workers who occupy an in-between position, experiencing outcomes traditionally associated with both job retention and job loss such as the partial benefits of employment combined with partial losses such as uncertainty, reduced attachment, or loss of income. Introducing *Liminals* makes

visible the more fluid and boundary-crossing transitions which fall between established categories within the binary inside/outside framework (Devine et al., 2003).

The findings also show how extensive STW use could make workers' experiences align differently with existing outcome categories. Workers who remained formally employed under extensive STW frequently experienced significant changes in their work conditions, making them more accurately understood as *Endurers* (McLachlan et al., 2021) rather than *Survivors* (Brockner et al., 1987). Conversely, for workers who entered the external labour market, STW could intensify negative outcomes by delaying rehiring, restricting overall mobility, and prolonging transitions, thereby amplifying the depth of experiences found in the *Victims* category (Bennett et al., 1995).

At the same time, the thesis shows that although STW served as an important safety net by helping organisations retain staff and reduce redundancies, its extensive and prolonged use also contributed to blurring the boundaries between internal and external labour markets, reinforcing the relevance of the *Liminal* category. Internal labour market theory traditionally portrays internal labour markets as closed systems, i.e. relatively insulated from external fluctuations (Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Williamson et al., 1975). However, STW implementation examined here illustrates how workers may remain formally employed while experiencing conditions typically associated with external labour markets, such as reduced income, reduced work hours, disrupted routines, and reduced social interaction (Brand, 2015; Jahoda, 1982). While STW is designed as a temporary measure, its prolonged use during the pandemic produced hybrid experiences marked by uncertainty and job insecurity, similar to those traditionally associated with *Victims* (Bennett et al., 1995) or *Liminals*. These dynamics challenge assumptions about clear separation between internal and external labour markets (cf. Grimshaw et al., 2001) and highlight the need to analytically capture the liminal states especially when restructuring processes involve extensive STW. In this sense, STW not only protect jobs but also reshapes the perceived boundaries of the labour market itself.

The thesis further highlights how overlapping dimensions of restructuring consequences extend beyond organisational boundaries. Internally, fluctuating STW levels contributed to uncertainty and risk reinforcing lock-in effects. Externally, they slowed down overall mobility and delayed rehiring processes, potentially prolonging job transitions. Temporary employment solutions became a strategy for workers in order to avoid unemployment but often resulted in hourly or skill-based underemployment. This left many workers in a liminal position, neither fully employed nor unemployed, which highlights the relevance of the *Liminal* category.

The sectoral context of the hotel sector further shaped restructuring outcomes. Limited prior exposure to large-scale restructuring meant that organisations lacked established routines, while the sector's heavy exposure to social distancing restrictions intensified the need for rapid and extensive STW implementation. Workers' relative low wages (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2023) made income losses under STW particularly challenging, especially for workers with limited financial margins and little access to financial support from families. In addition to the income loss caused by STW, the loss of tips further intensified the financial pressure, an sectoral-specific difference which has not been recognised in earlier studies of other sectors (cf. Hijzen & Venn, 2011).

In addition, the sector's generally low levels of formal education and reliance on informal skill development (Cassel et al., 2018) complicated job transitions in an already constrained labour market. Across both external and internal labour markets, workers' transitions were also shaped by their broader life circumstances, including caregiving responsibilities, financial stability and access to social support, which served as both enablers and constraints. In line with previous studies on family support during transitions (Gush et al., 2015b), the thesis shows that such support is not only important for workers who face job loss but equally important for those placed on extensive STW. This highlights the fact that restructuring outcomes are shaped by the interplay between organisational and labour market conditions as well as the contexts of workers' lives.

By bridging restructuring research with STW studies and bringing workers' perspectives to the forefront, the thesis deepens understanding of transitions across internal and external labour markets and reveals the need to refine categories of restructuring outcomes and how extensive STW can reshape these experiences. It also shows how individuals navigate involuntary change shaped by both their life circumstances and sector-specific constraints. In doing so, it expands restructuring research (McGrath, 2024), deepens insights into transitions across labour markets (Heyes & Tomlinson, 2021), and extends insights into workers' experiences during organisational restructuring (MacKenzie et al., 2025; Mussagulova et al., 2023). Conducted within the hotel sector, the thesis also adds to the growing body of research at the intersection of work and tourism (Baum et al., 2016; Ladkin et al., 2023) by providing empirical insights into how organisational restructuring is experienced and navigated by hotel workers, and how it is shaped by sector-specific conditions.

The pandemic marked the first large-scale use of STW in its current form, revealing both strengths and its unintended consequences. Understanding these effects is crucial not only for analytical purposes but also for improvement of the system and preparation for future crises. The findings suggest that organisations should plan for prolonged periods of support when implementing extensive STW schemes and recognise that fluctuating STW levels can influence workers' perceptions of job security. Maintaining systematic work environment processes during STW implementation is essential to identify emerging risks and mitigate negative effects on worker wellbeing. The findings also indicate the importance of support measures which take workers' life and family situation into account. Workers with limited social or financial resources may require more structured support; from organisations during extensive STW implementation, and from job security councils when facing job loss.

### **Directions for future research**

While this thesis offers valuable insights, the study is based on data collected during the pandemic, covering up to 27 months post-redundancy. Future research could adopt longitudinal approaches to examine the long-term effects of restructuring involving STW by conducting

follow-up interviews with workers who have direct or indirect experience of STW implementation.

The role of transition support was not explored in-depth, primarily due to low participant engagement with such services. Future research could examine the underlying reasons for the limited utilisation of available transition support in this sector and explore alternative strategies to communicate these resources to workers. Further, examining the experience of individuals who do engage with transition support, particularly within workforces characterised by relative low levels of formal education, could offer valuable insights for both policy development and practical implementation.

As highlighted throughout the thesis, substantial sectorial differences exists between the hotel sector and the sectors which have dominated previous restructuring studies (Cederlöf, 2024; Dobbins et al., 2013; Gonäs et al., 2006). Future research could further explore how perceptions of restructuring consequences vary across sectors, e.g. by comparing transitions into underemployment in the manufacturing sector, where permanent full-time contracts are the norm, with the hotel sector, characterised by a high proportion of temporary and part-time employment contracts (Baum et al., 2020). More extensive research designs, including broader samples or multi-sector studies, would also help test the theoretical generalisability of the thesis's contribution. Incorporating sampling which enables international comparisons would further uncover workers' experiences of restructuring under different institutional and labour market conditions.

The Job Transition Model could further be developed and expanded, e.g. by integrating workers' access to various support structures. Previous research has highlighted such structures as an important contextual factor shaping both the consequences of organisational restructuring and workers' capacity to navigate these changes (cf. McLachlan et al., 2022). These support structures may be connected either to the internal or the external labour market, with some also being universally available to all workers, e.g. the reformed transition support in Sweden implemented in October 2022. Incorporating these dimensions could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different forms

of support influence workers' transitions during restructuring, and how these may differ across different national and sectorial contexts.

If we return to the workers' voices one last time, to Rose-Mary who asked: *What the hell am I going to do now?*

If I was sitting with you today, Rose-Mary, I would say this: what felt like an ending was in fact the beginning of a transition through a labour market landscape more uncertain and complex than anything you had been prepared for. How you navigated uncertainty, organisational restructuring, and shifting boundaries between internal and external labour markets, has helped reveal what current theories could not. Your path, and those of workers like you, has expanded how we understand restructuring outcomes and job transitions, and made visible the liminal spaces which organisational restructuring may produce but rarely acknowledges.

So, thank you once again, for sharing your important stories.

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## 9. Appendix

**Appendix 1 – Table of participants**

Pseudonym	W/M	Age span	Position at the hotel	Made redundant (y/n)	Interviewed time after restructuring (months)
Andreas	m	50-59	Food & Beverage team leader	yes	10 m
Beatrice	w	20-29	Receptionist team leader	yes	9 m
Cecilia	w	20-29	Restaurant runner	yes	10 m
Danielle	w	30-39	Receptionist team leader	yes	12 m
Elliot	m	20-29	Bartender	yes	12 m
Fiona	w	40-49	Event team leader	yes	12 m
Gertrud	w	30-39	Breakfast host	yes	13 m
Hans	m	20-29	Bartender	yes	13 m
Ivan	m	30-39	Breakfast host	yes	13 m
Joseph	m	20-29	Bartender	yes	13 m
Karen	w	30-39	Group and conference	yes	11 m, 24 m
Louisa	w	30-39	Food & Beverage team leader	yes	11 m
Madison	w	50-59	Breakfast team leader	yes	12 m, 24 m
Noelle	w	50-59	Conference team leader	yes	12 m, 24 m
Olivia	w	40-49	Waitress	yes	13 m
Patricia	w	30-39	Waitress	yes	13 m
Rose-Mary	w	30-39	Restaurant team leader	yes	15 m, 24 m
Steven	m	30-39	Chef	yes	15 m, 24 m
Tyra	w	40-49	Breakfast host	yes	15 m
Ursula	w	20-29	Waitress	yes	15 m
Veronica	w	20-29	Conference project leader	yes	26 m
Wivian	w	20-29	Breakfast host	yes	27 m
Åsa	w	20-29	Food & Beverage team leader	yes	27 m
Alice	w	30-39	Manager	no	9 m
Bodil	w	30-39	Guest relations host	no	9 m
Cassandra	w	20-29	Receptionist	no	9 m
Darin	m	40-49	Food & Beverage team leader	no	10m
Eleonore	w	40-49	Receptionist team leader	no	10m
Fredrika	w	30-39	Guest relations team leader	no	10m
Gina	w	20-29	Receptionist	no	10m
Hildur	w	40-49	Waitress	no	10m
Ingvar	m	40-49	Guest relations host	no	10m
Johannes	m	30-39	Conference host	no	12 m
Karim	m	20-29	Conference host	no	12 m
Lily	w	50-59	Manager	no	10m
Mona	w	20-29	Receptionist	no	12 m
Naemi	w	40-49	Receptionist team leader	no	14m
Ottilia	w	30-39	Receptionist	no	14m
Per	m	30-39	Manager	no	14m
Regina	w	20-29	Receptionist	no	14m

## Appendix 2: Intervjuguide uppsagda (redundant workers)

*Inled kort med presentation av projektet samt dig själv, få personen att känna sig avslappnad i intervjusituationen. Observera att frågorna kan behöva anpassas beroende vilken utav parterna som intervjuas, se till att få de olika perspektiven.*

Vill du börja med att berätta om vem du är? (ålder, situation privat/familj? Hur länge i branschen och hos denna arbetsgivare? Vad jobbade du med hos arbetsgivaren? Anställningsform? Arbetsuppgifter? Tidigare yrkeserfarenhet? Utbildningsbakgrund)

Skulle du kunna ta mig tillbaka till innan krisen, berätta vad som hände och vad blev nästa steg? Ta mig igenom processen och berätta så kan jag komma med följdfrågor allt eftersom (berätta om resa, börja med tema 1 – Tillkännagivandet om varsel och uppsägning)

### Tema 1 - Tillkännagivandet om varsel och uppsägning

Hur och när fick du veta att företaget skulle varsla om uppsägning eller dra ner på personalstyrkan på andra sätt?

Hur reagerade du på när du fick veta att du skulle bli av med din anställning?

Hur fick ni veta vilka anställda som skulle bli uppsagda och förlora anställningen?

Hur upplevde du tiden från när ni fick information om varsel till du fick reda på att du skulle bli uppsagd? Hur lång var perioden? Uppsägningstid?

Vilket stöd fanns det under denna period från kollegor, företag och fack?

Vilket stöd har du privat (familj)?

Hur reagerade du när du fick reda på du skulle bli uppsagd/förlora anställningen?

Hur reagerade partner/familj? Hur påverkar detta din ekonomiska situation?

Hur upplevde du arbetsmiljösituationen under tiden du är kvar? Förändrat?

*Vill du berätta om tiden efter att du fått veta att du skulle förlora anställningen?*

### Tema 2 - Omställningsprocessen

Hur lång var din uppsägningstid?

Vilket stöd fick du under uppsägningstiden? (företag/fackförbund/omställningsföretag)

Hur upplevde du detta stöd och var det till någon hjälp för din omställning? Vad fungerade bra med stödet? Vad fungerade mindre bra?

Hur påverkades relationen till familj och vänner under denna tid? Hur viktigt var det i relation till stödet från omställningsföretag?

Vad gjorde du under uppsägningstiden? Om du sökte jobb, hur gjorde du det? Intresse? Utbildning? Fritidsaktiviteter? Sociala aktiviteter?

*Har du hittat ny sysselsättning efter uppsägningen? Berätta om vägen dit samt tiden som arbetslös? (Vad fick du för nytt jobb/sysselsättning?)*

### Tema 3 – Jobbsök

Har du hittat ny sysselsättning efter uppsägningen? (om ja, vad fick du för nytt jobb/sysselsättning?)

Hur upplevde du det nya jobbet jämfört med det tidigare avseende anställningsvillkor, lön och arbetsinnehåll?

Hur länge var du arbetslös?

Hur upplevde du arbetslöshetsperioden? Vad gjorde du under denna tid? Sökte du aktivt nya arbeten? Berätta. Hur såg stödet ut från omställningsföretag och personliga nätverk?

*Vill du berätta om hur uppsägningen har påverkat dig?*

### Tema 4 - Konsekvenser av uppsägningen

Vilka konsekvenser upplevde du att uppsägningen medförde på den privata ekonomin/familjens ekonomi?

Vilka konsekvenser (positiva och negativa) upplevde du att uppsägningen medförde på; sociala gemenskaper (vänner/familj) och privatliv - psykiska och fysiska hälsa?

Påverkade uppsägningen dina relationer med tidigare jobbkompisar på något sätt? Medförde uppsägningen att du funderade på att byta bana i yrkeskarriären, t ex studera, starta eget företag eller byta bransch?

*Hur ser du på framtida möjligheter att fortsätta en yrkeskarriär i branschen?*

### Tema 5 - Framtidsutsikter inom besöksnäringen

Hur ser du på arbetet i hotellbranschen i framtiden?

Hur ser karriärvägarna ut?

Är arbetet hållbart över ett yrkesliv eller behöver arbetsmiljön utvecklas på något sätt?

Hur ser du på kompetensutveckling och utbildning, kopplat till besöksnäringen?

*Är det något annat du reagerat på och vill tillägga? Något vi inte frågat om?*

### Appendix 3: Intervjuguide kvarvarande (remaining workers)

*Inled kort med presentation av projektet samt dig själv, få personen att känna sig avslappnad i intervjusituationen. Observera att frågorna kan behöva anpassas beroende vilken utav parterna som intervjuas, se till att få de olika perspektiven.*

Vill du börja med att berätta om vem du är? (ålder, situation privat/familj? Hur länge i branschen och hos denna arbetsgivare? Vad jobbar du med nu? Arbetsuppgifter? Tidigare yrkeserfarenhet? Utbildningsbakgrund)

Skulle du kunna ta mig tillbaka till innan krisen, berätta vad som hände och vad blev nästa steg? Ta mig igenom processen och berätta så kan jag komma med följdfrågor allt eftersom (berätta om resa, börja med tema 1 – Tillkännagivandet om företagsomställning och arbetstidsförkortning)

#### Tema 1 - Tillkännagivandet om företagsomställning och arbetstidsförkortning

Hur fick ni veta att företaget skulle omstrukturera och varsla personal om uppsägning och/eller korttidspermittera?

Har du varit korttidspermitterad under året?

Hur reagerade du när du fick veta att förändring skulle ske? Hur var din reaktion direkt efter? Hur reagerade du på tillkännagivandet av förändring och den direkta tiden efter?

Hur fick du besked att du fick behålla arbetet/korttidspermitteras? Hur reagerade du på det beskedet?

*Vill du berätta mer om hur den här förändringen påverkat dig och ditt arbete? Om du börjar med hur det var innan samt hur det är nu?*

#### Tema 2 - Sociala och organisatoriska arbetsmiljöaspekter under och efter omstruktureringen

Hur upplever du arbetsmiljön generellt inom branschen? Vad är de bra aspekterna och de mindre bra aspekterna i arbetsmiljön?

Hur upplevde du arbetsmiljön på företaget under omställningsprocessen? (hjälp-text: Hur har ni det på arbetet just nu? Skillnad från innan? Prova först med "arbetsmiljön" låt intervjupersonen tänka till lite grann, prova annars med några ord: stress, uppgivenhet, fysiskt, hur har du ditt arbete förändrats?)  
hoppa mellan två hotell?

Vilka förändringar har skett i arbetsmiljön? (organisatoriska, sociala svårigheter?) Vilket stöd fanns från kollegor och chefer för att hantera osäkerheter och arbetsmiljöfrågor?

Påverkades arbetsinnehållet/arbetsbelastningen på något sätt under och efter omstruktureringen? Hur?

Blev ni färre personer som skulle sköta era arbetsuppgifter? Vilka effekter fick det?

*Hur fångas de psykosociala aspekterna? till exempel krav/kontroll/socialt stöd, eller frågor om arbets kvalitet i bredare form (inflytande, work/lifebalance, arbetstider, struktur osv)*

Om chef: hur har du upplevt denna situation ur ett chefsperspektiv/hur har du upplevt din tid som anställd?

*Du berättade tidigare att du varit korttidspermitterad, vill du berätta om hur du har upplevt den här tiden, och hur det har påverkat dig, privat samt i arbetet?*

Tema 3 - Specifika frågor till personer som varit korttidspermitterade/korttidsarbete

Hur stor del av tjänsten var din permitteringsgrad? Förändrades den under tiden? Om ja, hur påverkade det dig?

Upplvde du något inkomstbortfall/ekonomisk förlust? Hur stort var det i så fall och hur påverkade det dig/din livssituation/familj?

Upplvde du en osäkerhet kring anställningens framtid (att det kunde leda till uppsägning)? Berätta.

Vilka möjligheter eller svårigheter med korttidspermitteringen? Vilka är fördelarna och nackdelarna med korttidsarbete?

Vad sysselsatte du dig på den ökade lediga tiden?

Hade din arbetsgivare synpunkter på vad den permitterade tiden skulle fyllas med?

Påverkade korttidspermitteringarna sociala relationer inom och utanför arbetet (med vänner och kollegor) på något sätt? Hur?

Påverkade korttidsarbetet privatlivet på något sätt?

Hade du hellre sett andra lösningar än korttidspermitteringar, vilka i sådant fall?

*Vill du berätta om hur du ser på framtiden inom branschen?*

Tema 4 - Framtidsutsikter inom besöksnäringen

Hur ser du på arbetet i hotellbranschen i framtiden?

Hur ser karriärvägarna ut?

Är arbetet hållbart över ett yrkesliv eller behöver arbetsmiljön utvecklas på något sätt?

Hur ser du på kompetensutveckling och utbildning, kopplat till besöksnäringen?

*Är det något annat du reagerat på och vill tillägga? Något vi inte frågat om?*



# Navigating Organisational Restructuring and Job Transitions

This is a thesis about hotel workers' experiences of organisational restructuring and job transitions during the COVID-19 pandemic. It draws on four empirical papers based on 45 semistructured interviews conducted in a labour market shaped by fluctuating demand, pandemic restrictions, organisational restructuring and extensive shorttime work (STW). The analysis captures insights from hotel workers across multiple post-restructuring labour market statuses, illustrating job transitions across internal and external labour markets and the liminal space in between. Across all workers, restructuring brought substantial changes to both work and employment conditions.

The thesis integrates theories of internal and external labour markets, restructuring strategies, job transitions and established restructuring outcomes categories: Victims, Endurers and Survivors. To capture experiences overlooked within existing frameworks a fourth category, Liminals, is introduced. To analyse these transitions, the thesis develops the Job Transition Model, a visual and analytical model grounded in theoretical and empirical insights from this thesis, applied here to understand job transitions across labour markets in the context of organisational restructuring involving extensive STW implementation.

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