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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE, POWER
DYNAMICS, AND PERCEIVED HUMANNES: A Case Study**

Master Thesis

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I hereby declare, that this thesis is
entirely the result of my own work and
submitted for the Degree of Master of Science
in Tallinn University of Technology.
For the present thesis no degree has been conferred
on me before either in this or in any other university.

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The work meets the stated requirements for Master thesis.

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Abstract

The current thesis focuses on the relationship between three variables: organizational change – demerger, power dynamics, and perceived humanness, specifically dehumanization. An organization went through a process of demerger, in other words a separation. The aim of the thesis was to study how demerger and a shift in the power dynamics affected the humanness dimension of the relationship between people. The participants of the study were from two organizations: I-level and II-level employees, all females. Data were collected by questionnaires and interviews; therefore, the research design of the thesis is considered as mixed method. Grounded theory was the used research method, mostly applied in the data analysis section. This method refers to the generation of a new theoretical perspective stemming from the collected data. Data analysis consisted of two phases: transcription and coding. The final results of the coding phase were emerged categories with dimensional properties. The findings revealed that none of the three propositions were not supported by the data. In conclusion, the relationship between I-level and II-level employees did not become dehumanizing even after the demerger, or the shift in power dynamics. Therefore, a new theoretical perspective emerged by suggesting that if the social connection and the relationship between people is strong and cooperative it can disable dehumanization. This suggestion could be seen as trivial, but nevertheless it requires further research under similar circumstances to study the situation, and maybe find reasons explaining the occurred phenomenon.

Keywords: dehumanization, perceived humanness, organizational change, demerger, power dynamics

Introduction

In a world of constant change ... *“change is the only constant”*.

Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 535 – c. 473 BC)

Drastic changes in organizational arrangements have already been occurring for 30 years (Boonstra & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 1998), and still to this day organizations need to change constantly (McKinsey & Company, 2008, as cited in Burnes, 2009 Burnes, 2009). Change is a current and important issue to face for organizations, because “there is no growth without change” (Abraham, 2011, p. 69).

Organizational change, specifically the process of demerger, was the starting point of my research. An organization in Estonian educational counselling system went through a process of demerger, a change in the organization, and while being close to the consequences, and tension, I decided to study the occurred phenomena in depth, which led me to an idea to write my thesis on the situation.

The organization in question provides educational counselling service to schools in one of the regions. In 2014, Estonian Ministry of Education and Research launched a project in order to cover all regions in the country by creating new system for educational counselling, leading the particular organization to undergo demerger. Demerger in turn shifted the power dynamics between the newly created organization and the existing one by bringing up confusion and new arrangements among the employees (SA Innove, 2016).

The new situation between the two organizations described in the previous section can be examined through three main variables: demerger, power dynamics, and perceived humanness. Therefore, the aim of current thesis was to study the relationship between the aforementioned variables in the new organizational setting. More specifically I was interested if after organizational change (i.e. demerger) the employees of the newly created

organization will perceive the employees of other organization less human due to shifts in power dynamics – the research question of current thesis.

When people perceive others as less human, a phenomenon called dehumanization, occurs (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Some research has been conducted about power and its effect on dehumanizing behavior (e.g. Lammers & Stapel, 2011, and Gwinn, Judd & Park, 2013), and about dehumanization in organizational setting (e.g. Christoff, 2014). Organizational change, power, and dehumanization are considerably diversely studied areas in psychology, causing complicity in finding a new angle to close a gap in science. Fortunately, the research about the relationship between these three variables – obtaining power after a demerger in organization and power's effect on dehumanizing behavior – is insufficient and needs to be improved.

Organizational Change

Organizational change is a transformation a company or an organization goes through, which can be expressed by the means of outsourcing, empowerment (Boonstra, 2004), mergers and acquisitions, demergers and consolidations etc. (Burnes, 2009). A few years ago Estonian educational counselling system was also facing a new change. In 2014, Estonian Ministry of Education and Research launched a project in order to create a new national educational counselling system covering all regions in the country, which led to major changes in organizational structures in some areas. One particular region in Estonia already had a functioning educational counselling center, thus the creation of the new system in the particular region meant changing the current setup through the means of demerger (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium, 2014).

Demerger.

Demerger can be defined as a segregation of business activities into one or more companies or groups of companies. Reasons for demerging are various, e.g. transferring a business to a new company, or facilitating the sale of part of a business to third parties (Bryer & Simensky, 2002). It is considered a major change process which can have a radical effect on organization's well-being and individual members. The consequences of demerger can be detrimental, including increased stress, insecurity, and uncertainty among those involved with the process (Hoare & Cartwright, 1997).

Shift in Power Dynamics

Demerger is not the only change that took place with these two organizations. When organizations undergo fundamental changes, the existing balance of power also changes (Pfeffer, 1992, and Greiner & Schein, 1988, as cited in Boonstra & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 1998), and accordingly after the demerger power dynamics in the two organizations in question shifted. These power-related changes may have some effects on employees. People involved in the process of change can be subjected to power dynamics, which might be invisible and sometimes even unconscious (Boonstra & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 1998), and consecutively power can affect relationships between people.

Defining power offers lot of confusion and difficulties (Lukes, 1986, as cited in Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003), hence Boonstra & Bennebroek Gravenhorst (1998, p. 99) chose a broad definition and interpret power as "a dynamical social process affecting opinions, emotions, and behavior of interest groups in which inequalities are involved with respect to the realization of wishes and interests." More specifically, the type of power under discussion in current thesis refers to expert power in French & Raven's

(1959) typology, which is defined as the ability to influence others' behavior with recognized knowledge, skills, or abilities.

Consequences of power and humanness.

Power has metamorphic changes on social relationships. Main consequences of power are concluded by Gwinn, Judd, & Park (2013) relying on their experiments. They found that power had an effect on the powerful – interpersonally distancing them from others, but also power made the powerful objectify powerless persons more (Gruenfeld, Insei, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008; Gwinn et al., 2013), take others' point-of-view less often (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006; Gwinn et al., 2013), feel less empathy for others (Van Kleef et al., 2008; Gwinn et al., 2013), and view powerless as more socially distant (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2012). These consequences are linked to a concept of humanness, which leads to the core of the current thesis – dehumanization. According to Haslam & Loughnan (2014), power is the only social-structural factor investigated as a contributor to dehumanization. Lammers & Stapel (2011) found that previously power-primed participants in a medical decision-making context were more likely to dehumanize and to give more painful but effective treatment to patients. Therefore they concluded that the experience or possession of power increases dehumanization. The capacity for power to increase dehumanization has been further demonstrated by Gwinn et al. (2013), who found that high-power participants attributed fewer uniquely human traits to low-power participants than vice versa.

Perceived Humanness

To perceive a human being as less human is unimaginable, yet it happens frequently. Dehumanization refers to a psychological phenomenon whereby people

perceive a person or group as lacking humanness, in other words their human characteristics are denied to them (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Depending on the paradigm, the concept of humanness can be specified in various ways, hence the importance to clarify the approach used in current paper. Haslam's (2006) approach of humanness is widely used in the literature of dehumanization, therefore it is also used in this paper. He proposed that humanness, which is denied to the other, can be understood in two distinct senses – uniquely human and human nature. The first, uniquely human characteristics, are considered exclusively human, these personality traits do not apply to other species. The other, human nature characteristics, are typically or essentially human, aspects of human nature, and may not be the ones distinguishing us from other species. "Curiosity, for example, might be seen as part of human nature but it is no way unique to our species, just as politeness might be seen as unique to humans but not a fundamental or typical part of our nature" (Haslam & Bain, 2007, p. 58).

Forms of dehumanization.

Haslam (2006) proposes that if there are two distinct senses of humanness, then two distinct forms of dehumanization should occur when the respective attributes are denied to others. He has suggested a model which summarizes the conceptions of humanness and two those coinciding forms of dehumanization, here presented in Figure 1.

Uniquely human traits define the boundary separating humans from animals. These characteristics include civility, moral sensibility, maturity, refinement, and rationality. When uniquely human traits are denied to others, they are perceived as uncultured, immoral or amoral, childlike, coarse, and irrational. Uniquely human characteristics are seen as obtained rather than inborn, primarily reflect socialization and learning, and presumably differ between cultures and vary within populations. People perceived as

lacking what distinguishes humans from animals is considered as animalistic form of dehumanization. Animalistic dehumanization rests on a direct contrast between humans and animals. Perceiving people as lacking uniquely human qualities (e.g. refinement) places them below others on a scale of development or evolution (Haslam, 2006). Animalistic dehumanization is frequently discussed in the context of race, ethnicity, furthermore immigration and genocide (Christoff, 2014).

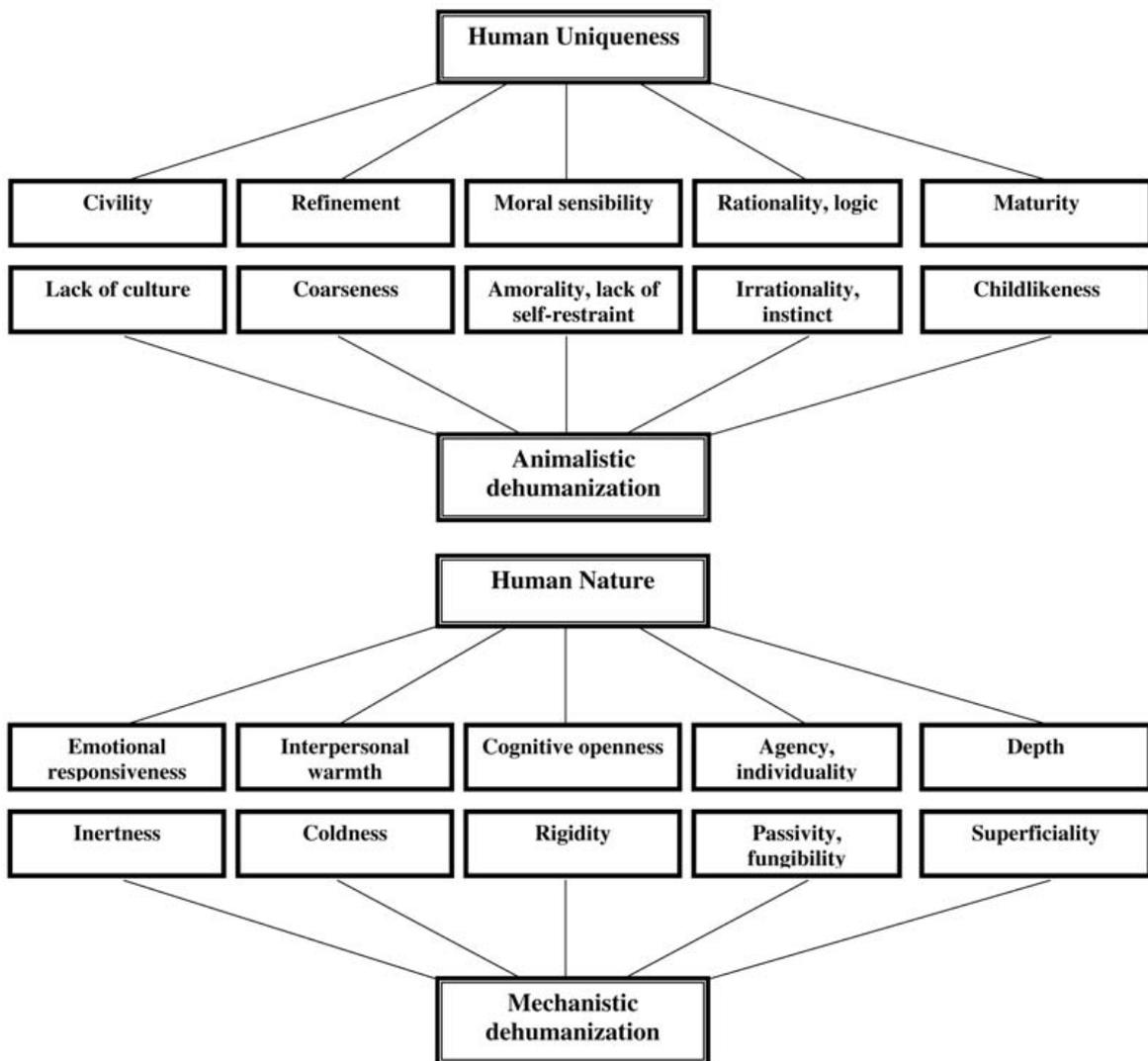


Figure 1. Concepts of humanness and concurring forms of dehumanization (Haslam, 2006).

Human nature characteristics involve cognitive openness, emotional responsiveness, interpersonal warmth, depth, and vital agency. They are seen as fundamental nature that is

embedded in a person. Human nature traits are deeply rooted, biologically based, universal across cultures. When human nature is denied to others, they are perceived as inert, cold, rigid, passive, and superficial. The combination of these characteristics represent a view of others as object- or automaton-like. This form of dehumanization can therefore be described as mechanistic. Mechanistic dehumanization contrasts humans with machines, the core properties of humanness distinguish us from automata. The mechanistic form of dehumanization holds a sense of horizontal comparison, which is based on perceived dissimilarity (Locke, 2005). A person who is denied human nature is seen more nonhuman than subhuman (Haslam, 2006). Mechanistic dehumanization is more likely to occur in interpersonal interactions and organizational settings (Christoff, 2014).

Diversity of dehumanization.

Dehumanization is a highly diverse phenomenon. Variations of dehumanization represent a spectrum of blatancy, ranging from explicit likenings of people to despised nonhumans to weaker implicit associations of some people with more human attributes than others (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014, p. 407).

Dehumanization can sometimes be blunt and obvious, as when African Americans were officially declared to be worth three fifths of a person (Haslam, Bain, Douge, Lee, & Bastian, 2007), or in a case of immigration and genocide (Haslam, 2006). At other times dehumanization may be more implicit, as in stereotypes that deny uniquely human or human nature qualities to groups or an individual (Haslam, 2006), or in a situation when a manager talks to a subordinate in a condescending manner, or forgets the name of an employee (Bastian & Haslam, 2011). These implicit aspects of maltreatments can occur daily (Sue et al., 2007), in the absence of direct conflict or aggression (Haslam et al., 2007), and therefore may appear innocent, harmless, and can even be unseen.

Nevertheless, the consequences of these everyday maltreatments are experienced as subtly dehumanizing by their targets and have implications for persons' experience of themselves as human (Bastian & Haslam, 2011). Subtle forms of dehumanization are not exclusively apparent in group contexts, but also in people's understandings of the self and its individuality from others (Haslam et al., 2007).

One of the examples of the diversity of dehumanization is its spectrum of blatancy as discussed in the prior section, but the circumstances and surroundings in which dehumanization occurs illustrate a different facet of the named phenomenon. The first researchers to focus on dehumanization systematically were viewing it in the context of mass violence (Kelman, 1976, and Staub, 1989, as cited in Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). These brutal contexts mentioned in the previous paragraph, i.e. genocide, and war, are considered as roots of dehumanization studies (Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2015). However, dehumanization has received attention outside this original violent context, it has been applied to everyday life and organizational settings as well (e.g. Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2015; Christoff, 2014; Bastian & Haslam, 2011). These newer directions refer to the range of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and broader social conditions that further dehumanization (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014).

Infra-humanization.

A relatively new perspective on dehumanization-related processes was initiated by psychologists in Belgium called infra-humanization. Infra-humanization proposes that people tend to perceive out-group members as less human than in-group members. This process can be subtle, in contrast to the blatant outcomes of dehumanization. Leyens et al. (2001) found that three attributes distinguish humans from animals: intelligence, language, and secondary (i.e. refined) emotions. Since these secondary emotions (e.g. joy,

embarrassment, sorrow, love) are unique to human, attributing them less to out-group members than to in-group members results in denying the out-group's humanity.

Therefore, the out-group is less human, more animal, compared to the in-group. Infra-humanization can be expressed in various behaviors, and does not only involve perceiving in-group as possessing more uniquely human characteristics (Leyens, Demoulin, Vaes, Gaunt, & Paladino, 2007), but also an active reluctance to accept out-group's humanity (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014).

Some authors prefer to use the term dehumanization for severe or absolute denials of humanness, in their work it was "taken to include milder forms in which people are ascribed lesser degrees of humanness relative to other people or to themselves at other times" (Bastian & Haslam, 2010, p.107). Basing on previous approach by Bastian & Haslam (2010), milder forms of dehumanization are included to the description as well. Although the focus of this thesis is on a relationship between two groups (therefore strictly taken on infra-humanization), the term dehumanization is applied in current thesis since it is more known, widely used (Leyens et al., 2007), and includes the common characteristics among the diverse phenomenon (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014).

Organizations Studied

A project for changing Estonian educational counselling system was launched in 2014 and in one of the regions in the country an organization went through a process of demerger. The reason for demerging was a fact that an educational counselling center already existed in that particular region, hence a decision was made to keep the current center and recruit employees to the new center from the existing center. Therefore, the employees were offered a position in the new center, meaning the latter organization's workforce consists of the employees who segregated from the first center (I-level

employee, personal communication, October 24, 2016). In terms of organizational change, the situation where employees are recruited to another company but are still sharing some business activities with the previous company, is considered as demerger.

The occurred organizational change, demerger, has allowed two organizations with distinct functions exist, thus the necessity to understand their differences. The initial center, where the employees segregated from, belongs to the subdivision of local government and is defined as *a first-level organization*. The I-level center concentrates their educational counselling service to students in their region (SA Innove, 2011). Employees of the I-level center work at schools on a daily basis offering psychological support and counselling.

The newly created center is a subdivision of national government and considered *a second-level organization*; its educational counselling serves an advisory function. Their work is oriented towards giving advice to adults relevant to student, i.e. the parents, and teachers, but also I-level employees who have handled the case of the student (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium, 2014). The two organizations cooperate frequently on student's cases.

As mentioned earlier, demerger elicited a change in power under these new circumstances. The difference in power dynamics is illustrated by a counselling committee, which is embodied by II-level employees after the demerger. Counselling committee provides decisions and injunctions to schools in order to find a suitable learning environment for the student. During the time when only one center existed in the region, before the demerger, the counselling committee belonged to the I-level center. The fact that all changes in student's curriculum have to be supported by a judgement done by regions' counselling committee gives II-level employees more power than I-level employees (SA Innove, 2016).

This power difference is categorized as expert power, referring to the ability to influence others' behavior with recognized knowledge, skills, or abilities (French & Raven, 1959). Powerful people may have influence on a particular choice (Yetton & Bottger, 1982), and are sought out to give advice (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981), which is similar to the case of I-level and II-level employees. In essence, the creation of the II-level educational counselling system evoked a shift in power dynamics. This can be viewed as a direct consequence of the demerger.

Propositions

In the light of the literature review provided, three propositions are offered:

- (1) Demerger allows the relationship between I-level and II-level employees to become dehumanizing.

As mentioned in Hoare & Cartwright (1997), demerger can have a significant negative effect on organization's well-being and on members as well. Therefore demerger could have allowed the relationship between employees to deteriorate and become dehumanizing.

- (2) Dehumanizing relationship between I-level and II-level employees is expressed by subtle indirect conflicts.

Dehumanization is mostly identified in the presence of a direct conflict, but it can also occur in more subtle ways, or even in the absence of conflicts (Haslam et al., 2007).

- (3) II-level employees perceive I-level employees less human because they possess less power than II-level employees.

Power has been directly linked to increase dehumanization proved by different authors. For example, Gwinn et al. (2013) found that power caused people to see less humanity in the less-powerful, and Lammers & Stapel (2011) showed that possession of power increases denying humanness to people, and perceiving them as objects or animals (i.e. less human).

Method

Study Design

The aim of this thesis was to examine the changed situation between two cooperating organizations after demerger by especially focusing on the consequences. The period of confusion and disagreements was an adequate starting point for studying the relationship between two organizations, as complicated times put the cooperation of employees to the test.

The studied situation occurring between the two organizations served as a case study. Therefore, a qualitative case study approach was used with a grounded theory analysis and approach for building a new theoretical perspective. Grounded theory also gives an opportunity to seek for rich data, and understand the situation and the relationship between the organizations in depth. Since three main variables (demerger, power dynamics, and dehumanization) are well researched topics in psychology, it was even more important to comprehend the occurred situation to find an original angle. In addition to qualitative study approach, quantitative research method was administered to supplement, improve, and provide added value for answering research questions. Since both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used the research design of current thesis is considered as mixed method.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is an approach to qualitative analysis developed by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1960s during a field observational study (Strauss, 1987). It refers to a specific methodology for the purpose of building theory from data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The emphasis of grounded theory is “on the generation of theory and the data in which that theory is grounded” (Glaser, 1978, as cited

in Strauss, 1987, p. 22) by organizing ideas which have emerged from analysis of the data (Strauss, 1987). The central idea is providing deep and rich theoretical descriptions of the organizational phenomena and the related contexts (Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2015).

Grounded theory methodology has elicited different opinions and understandings stemmed from various philosophical backgrounds resulting in divergent paradigms, methods, and approaches. The postpositivism of Glaser and Strauss, the pragmatic interactionist roots of Strauss and Corbin, and the constructivism of Charmaz offer some comprehension how methodologically diverse is the field of grounded theory (Ralph, Birks, & Chapman, 2015).

Grounded theory is a detailed method by systematically analyzing data, often sentence by sentence, or phrase by phrase of the field note, interview or other document. The focus is on constant comparison of the data (Strauss, 1987). The role of grounded theory in current thesis was expressed in data analysis – specifically in the coding phase. Data were analyzed using the grounded theory method following the Strauss & Corbin (1994) revision.

Participants

Current study focused on a situation between two organizations and since it was unique, other regions affected by creation of the national new system did not face this incident, it was managed as a case study. The sample contained participants from both organizations, I-level and II-level. One requirement of the participants was previous and rather frequent cooperating contact with another organizations' employees. Thus, not all employees were included in the sample, but a representative of each position was assigned totaling in ten participants, five from I-level organization and five from II-level organization, all female.

Data Collection

Data were collected by quantitative as well as qualitative methods. Qualitative data were collected mainly in order to comprehend and study the situation. Quantitative data collection was conducted to eliminate social desirability bias, which could occur during the interviews, especially regarding the perceived humanness variable. Quantitative data were collected before the qualitative data to ensure participants' ignorance about perceived humanness.

Background information.

In order to draw a more conclusive understanding of the process of creating the new center in one region, ministerial orders were perused and interviews were conducted before the data collection from the sample. Two background interviews were conducted in October 2016 with the project coordinators of the new created system in order to comprehend the situation and gain insight.

Quantitative research.

Quantitative research was implemented through the means of a questionnaire, which assessed perceived humanness. The questionnaire included 40 traits presented in Haslam & Bain (2007), with five positive uniquely human traits (e.g. broadminded, conscientious), five negative uniquely human traits (e.g. ignorant, rude), five positive human nature traits (e.g. helpful, fun-loving), five negative human nature traits (e.g. impatient, shy), ten positive filler traits (e.g. ambitious, passionate), and ten negative filler traits (e.g. insecure, passive). Full list of traits is demonstrated in Table 1. Items were placed in alphabetical order in the questionnaire to eliminate any bias or chance of patterns

in answers. Also, to ensure maximum understanding the traits were translated and presented in Estonian.

Table 1

Haslam & Bain's (2007) dehumanization traits

Valence	Uniquely human	Human nature	Traits
Positive	High	High	ambitious, analytic, imaginative, passionate, sympathetic
		Low	broadminded, conscientious, humble, polite, thorough
	Low	High	active, curious, friendly, helpful, fun-loving
		Low	contented, comfortable, even-tempered, relaxed, selfless
Negative	High	High	frivolous, high-strung, insecure, irresponsible, reserved
		Low	disorganized, hard-hearted, ignorant, rude, stingy
	Low	High	impatient, jealous, nervous, shy, impulsive
		Low	passive, simple-minded, timid, uncooperative, unemotional

The human nature and uniquely human trait sets had been previously validated as highly and distinctively on each sense of humanness (see Haslam, Bain, Douge, Lee, & Bastian, 2005). Participants filled out the questionnaire twice, firstly they rated the degree to which the employees of the other organization possessed each trait (e.g. "I perceive the employees of other organization as active"), and secondly the degree to which they felt the employees of other organization attribute each trait to them, i.e. metaperception of humanness (e.g. "Employees of other organization perceive me as impulsive"). If a participant was employed by the I-level organization, then employees of the other organization meant II-level organization, and vice versa. All forty traits were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Qualitative research.

Qualitative research involved conducting interviews and examining relevant documents. The interviews were semi-structured and divided into three parts: demerger and its consequences, power differences between organizations, and perceived humanness. Mostly participants described previously mentioned topics freely and in a detailed manner. The interviews were conducted in Estonian in order to guarantee full understanding. The duration of the interviews varied from 44 minutes 11 seconds to 1 hour 20 minutes 53 seconds.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed in two ways – quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data analysis was performed with SPSS software version 21. Student's t-tests were conducted to assess mean differences of dehumanization between I-level and II-level organizations.

Qualitative data analysis was done with software NVivo (version 11.4.0), whereby firstly all the interviews were transcribed word by word.

Next step after transcribing the interviews was coding the transcripts line by line, sentence by sentence, or phrase by phrase, depending on the content of the data. This is considered the open coding phase by Strauss & Corbin (1994). The purpose of this phase is to develop categories relating to the same phenomena emerging from concepts. Mostly concepts were coded phrase by phrase and sentence by sentence. Each developed category was defined by its properties and dimensions. Properties of a category are described as its multiple perspectives, which are presented on a continuum (Creswell & Poth, 2007). An example of open coding process is demonstrated in Table 2 with excerpts from interviews of I-level employees.

Table 2

Open coding process for category "formality"

Raw data	Open coding	Properties	Dimensions
"... they just make the formal... Yes, formal is their correct term. They tick something off	Us-them feeling Being formal	Affiliation Formality	Us ↔ Them Formal ↔ Unformal
I'm not denying they are doing immensely lot of work... Bureaucracy...	Doing something because it is required Acknowledging the work load Bureaucracy	Following orders Acknowledge Bureaucracy	Obedient ↔ Disobedient Acknowledge ↔ Deny High ↔ Low
What is on the paper. But to be honest, essentially it does not help us or the child much."	Paper work Importance of the content Usefulness of work Being helpful	Importance Usefulness Helpful	Important ↔ Unimportant Useful ↔ Useless Helpful ↔ Unhelpful
"I see the operations of II-level substantially more regulated and formal. They have more prescriptions, well more bureaucracy and... Everything is normalized, specified, defined... This... Yes, the organizational culture is much different."	Differences between organizations Extent of regulations Extent of formality Extent of prescriptions Bureaucracy Normalization Specifications Definitions Differences between organizations Organizational culture	Regulations Prescriptions Normalization Specifications Definitions	Many ↔ Few Many ↔ Few Many ↔ Few Many ↔ Few
"...and you started to look for opportunities to not share information on a daily basis anymore.	Finding another way Perceived communication Information sharing is less frequent	Perceived communication Frequency	Frequent ↔ Infrequent

Continues on the next page.

Raw data	Open coding	Properties	Dimensions
They did not need it for their job, but maybe we were used to it... Used to go and share not so relevant information sometimes..."	Necessity of informal communication	Necessity	Necessary \leftrightarrow Unnecessary
"(I: Did the communication become more formal since then?) – I felt like that yes."	Habits Relevance of information Formality of communication Changes	Relevance	Relevant \leftrightarrow Irrelevant

Note. "I" is an abbreviation for Interviewer.

By the end of the open coding process 8 core categories with 33 subcategories and approximately 250 properties emerged. The full list of all core categories and subcategories is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Core and subcategories after open coding

Core category	Subcategories
Affiliation	In-group-out-group; Work team
Differences between organizations	Bureaucracy; Flexibility; Focus of work and/or work roles; Formality; Local; Point of view; Workplace; Work style
Humanness	Humanness of other organization; Metaperception of humanness
One system	Exceptional situation
Organizational changes and new system	Changes in leadership; Coping with change; Coping with stress, Events, Growth, Homogeneousness; Preparation; Prescriptions and/or rules; Understanding the situation
Perceived communication	Boundaries; Coffee room, Greeting; Guilt; Miscommunication and/or misunderstandings
Power dynamics	Decisions and counselling committee; Lack of knowledge and/or skills
Relationship between organizations	Attitude; Cooperation; Dissatisfaction; Expectations; Ignorance; Responsibility; Tensions; Trust; Warmth; Work load

Results

Groups of five Haslam and Bain (2007) traits were averaged into the eight cells by crossing positive/negative valence, high/low human nature, and high/low uniquely human (UH). Means with standard deviation for both organizations' perception of each other's humanness and metaperception of humanness are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Perception of I- and II-level organization's humanness and metaperception of humanness, trait means and standard deviations

Human nature	Positive valence		Negative valence	
	High UH	Low UH	High UH	Low UH
	Perception of I-level organization's humanness (SD)			
High	3.72 (0.46)	4.04 (0.32)	1.68 (0.43)	1.44 (0.35)
Low	3.36 (0.47)	3.60 (1.00)	1.24 (0.16)	1.60 (0.42)
	Metaperception of humanness (SD)			
High	3.72 (0.22)	4.36 (0.55)	1.56 (0.53)	1.64 (0.68)
Low	4.00 (0.46)	3.48 (0.83)	1.20 (0.20)	1.28 (0.36)
	Perception of II-level organization's humanness (SD)			
High	3.76 (1.16)	3.72 (1.00)	2.16 (0.35)	2.20 (0.34)
Low	3.68 (0.41)	2.60 (0.63)	1.68 (0.20)	1.72 (0.46)
	Metaperception of humanness (SD)			
High	3.80 (0.37)	4.28 (0.43)	1.88 (0.65)	2.36 (0.71)
Low	3.36 (0.49)	3.00 (0.50)	1.60 (0.69)	1.32 (0.36)

Research Question

The research question consisted of three parts – demerger, humanness of the relationship between employees, and power dynamics. None of the performed Student's t-test resulted in significant differences between two organizations' means on uniquely human, human nature, or filler traits (all p 's > .07). These findings offer a negative answer

to the second part of the research question – I-level and II-level employees do not perceive the relationship between them as dehumanizing. Results from the qualitative data analysis confirm this finding. Participants described the relationship between I-level and II-level employees as “friendly and accommodative”, “positive”, “human and good”, “pleasant”, “respectful”, “developed and in-place”, “no conflicts or misunderstandings”. As one interviewee said, “I think they [I-level employees] are very human” (II-level employee).

Some participants also described the relationship as “need-based”, “a partnership”, “reserved and formal”, “work-related”, “constructive and practical”, by referring to a new facet, formality, which has appeared between the organizations after the demerger. One interviewee commented on the relationship between I-level and II-level employees after the demerger, “I do not know why being formal is easier” (II-level employee). Another respondent answered, “Yes, I felt like [the communication became more formal after the demerger]” (I-level employee). These results indicate a change in the formality of the communication between the employees, but not in perceived humanness as proposed in the research question.

First Proposition

A change in the relationship between employees was suggested in the first proposition (“Demerger has allowed the relationship between I-level and II-level employees to become dehumanizing”). The results show that some changes did elicit after the demerger, such as regarding the level of formality in communication, and changes in leadership, but the participants did not perceive the relationship between employees as dehumanizing. When discussing humanness and dehumanization in general, one interviewee replied: “I think that supportive professions, like us, probably even cannot have [dehumanization]” (I-level employee). Many respondents were having difficulties

answering to questions regarding descriptions about dehumanization (e.g. “To what extent you perceive others as inert, cold, rigid, passive, and/or superficial?”), and perceptions of specific forms of the phenomenon (e.g. “Could others perceive you as animalistic?”). Some did not reply, as one answered, “I cannot even think about... Or I do not know. It is such an interesting question, I cannot say” (II-level employee), and another responded “I have not thought about it, that it could be like that” (II-level employee). The results indicate the relationship between I-level and II-level employees did not become dehumanizing after the demerger.

Suggested in the first proposition, demerger was the starting point allowing the changes between the employees to occur. As presented in the previous sections, “dehumanizing” was not one of the adjectives used by the respondents to describe the relationship between I-level and II-level employees, but nevertheless, participants’ attitude towards each other could have changed after the demerger. One question in the interview regarding the perceived attitude was as follows, “How has the demerger affected your attitude towards others?”. 80% of the respondents ($n = 10$) answered negatively to the aforementioned question, meaning demerger did not have an effect on their attitude towards to employees of the other organization. All II-level ($n_{II-level} = 5$) and 3 I-level employees ($n_{I-level} = 5$) replied negatively to the previously mentioned question. However, 20% of the sample answered somewhat positively. One respondent said, “Well, I have become more cautious myself. Definitely more closed, and reserved, or formal” (I-level employee). Another one who agreed to demerger having an impact on the attitude said, “It has had an effect on [the attitude], but I do not know how to describe it. Well, maybe [my attitude] has changed a bit to the worse” (I-level employee). Both answers were partially vague, suggesting that the respondents were unsure. To conclude, the results presented in current and the previous section do not support the first proposition.

Second Proposition

The second proposition suggests that dehumanization between I-level and II-level employees is revealed by subtle indirect conflicts. The results introduced in the previous paragraphs show that dehumanization as a phenomenon did not occur between the employees. Nevertheless, the interview included some general questions about conflicts between I-level and II-level employees, for example, “Are there any conflicts between I-level and II-level employees?”. Two participants ($n = 10$) answered affirmatively to the question by replying, “Well, then I would say as it were” (I-level employee), and other responded, “Well, you could say there is more [than before]. The more the people, the more likely to have more tensions” (II-level employee). Mostly the participants answered negatively to the previous question, e.g., “I can speak for myself, I have to guess about others, but it seems I do not have any [conflicts]. I am telling you, I have not experienced any conflicts. I have experienced someone being upset or nervous about not having time... But no one has had negative attitude towards me, or no one has spoken badly about me” (I-level employee). The next interviewees had no knowledge of any current conflicts, “I do not know. I have no information about conflicts at the moment” (II-level employee), and, “Not that I know of” (two I-level employees), then one of them added, “I would not say that there are any at all. Maybe only the conflicts based on cases, obviously more conflicts could occur, but I believe we have improved our cooperation to an extent where we have managed to avoid conflict situations”. Another respondent replied laughingly, “I don't have a conflict with anyone” (II-level employee), and similarly answered a coworker, “This academic year [2016/17], personally I have not had any conflicts” (II-level employee). One II-level employee said, “I do not know, I have not noticed. You know, honestly, I do not know about any conflicts. Because to me, a conflict is something pretty serious”. After asking to recall if there were any conflicts from the demerger until the time of the

interview, one participant replied, “I do not know, I do not know if conflict is... Maybe more miscommunication occurred than before, but not conflicts. Not real conflict-conflicts” (II-level employee). The interviews were conducted from January to March 2017, meaning 80% of the participants did not perceive, experience, or had knowledge about any conflicts during that period of time.

Other questions regarding the conflicts between I-level and II-level employees were of a descriptive nature. Respondents described the situation, “I would say that, I have heard some judgements during the most intense period. It was last spring, maybe? Spring time, with lots of cases, and when people are tired, overworked. Both, not only II-level people, our people as well. These periods... When there are difficult situations, and some cases are in a dead end, then you need to find reasons for that” (I-level employee). Another one described the conflicts as, “I feel like people got offended” (I-level employee).

After asking the respondents to give an example of a conflict, one answered, “I know that in some cases, when I-level employees have turned to II-level employees asking for help or how to proceed with a case, then II-level employees have answered nervously or snapped “We did not have time to handle it yet”” (I-level employee). One example of a conflict was rather negative, “These [cases] that should have gotten in front of the the counselling committee in December, well, [II-level employees] said “No, we are not going to put the student to the committee, we are going to do it from the scratch”, this was the start of the conflicts. One example of the conflict: when II-level employees said at the beginning [of demerger], “You could choose the [II-level] specialists you turn to”, but actually when we turned to an employee, and they referred us to another one without any explanations, it got very confusing. Verbally they gave us an opportunity to choose, but immediately they erased it or changed it. Yes, it was very confusing, we did not understand if we have to present any papers or not. Did not know what to say to the parent, and it was

difficult to convince the parent to turn to II-level employees. Some conflicts arose because of that too". Then the respondent clarified, "It is not about the people or the personalities. Or that I would doubt their competence... It is not related to that. The system just does not work. It is about the system" (I-level employee). Some II-level employees agreed with the previous respondent by saying, "Yes, [conflicts] stem from the process, I think. From things that do not depend on us", "Well, probably some misunderstandings stem from these changes in the process". One participant described the conflicts as, "Well, I cannot think of a conflict... Maybe just arguing or quarrelling. Only when there are misunderstandings... One has their demands, others are used to old habits" (I-level employee).

Participants also listed the reasons why the conflicts arose, and how they were expressed, "I think, the conflicts are not behavioral... Maybe communication-related, but mostly stemming from the work. Based on, like, if II-level has some demands, they have not explained how long some things are going to take. Maybe the conflicts arose from misunderstandings" (I-level employee). One respondent said, "I have heard verbal, but maybe they are more cognitive, based on a feeling. You understand you have done something incorrectly, you understand you have left something undone, you understand you have not made the right decisions" (I-level employee). Few respondents discussed about personality as a reason for conflicts, "Absolutely. Yes, I am completely sure about that. I do not believe that the [conflicts] could be related to personalities at all" (II-level employee). Other interviewee disagreed with the previous respondent by saying, "Personality, work style, I do not know. Somehow some people did not match with each other... So, I guess [conflicts stemmed] from personalities" (II-level employee).

Some respondents thought the conflicts were more work-related, "Yes, work-related" (I-level employee). Whereas some were confused about conflicts being personal

or work-related, “I do not know, I think they are mixed. But I think they have been mostly behavioral... If there is a misunderstanding between people, who have worked together for years and respected each other, then [the conflict] is substantially more painful, and it is already personal, not work-related anymore” (II-level employee). An interviewee explained the situation as intersystem, “But the tensions are different, they are not between persons, but between systems. [Before the demerger] the conflicts were related to personalities, but now they are between two systems” (II-level employee).

To a question about the recurrence of conflicts after demerger, one respondent replied, “I would rather guess, on the second [academic] year [after the demerger], there were many conflicts” (I-level employee). Another interviewee discussed, “Before the demerger there were not any conflicts. Maybe there was anxiety. I am not saying even a conflict, there was anxiety in the air. Some kind of confusion at a certain moment; how to behave, and anxiety related to that. You do not know how, and then tension emerges” (II-level employee). One respondent explained the link between demerger and conflicts, “Without the demerger, there would be no conflicts? – Yes, because II-level employees were working for the I-level center before the demerger. Because here [I-level and II-level] were so tightly involved, the demerger was difficult. Well, I have been in the educational counselling system since the beginning, and in other regions, where I-level and II-level were separated from the beginning, these kind of things like [conflicts] do not occur at all” (II-level employee).

The results from the first proposition do not support the occurrence of dehumanization, hence dehumanization did not reveal itself. The findings reveal only 20% ($n = 10$) of the respondents actually perceived some conflicts during the time from demerger until the interview, but did not straightforwardly mention any subtle or indirect conflicts. However, the majority of the sample, 80% of the participants, replied negatively

to having experiences any conflicts at all. The results do not support the second proposition.

Third Proposition

The final, third, proposition was as follows: II-level employees will perceive I-level employees less human because they possess less power than II-level employees. Even though the shift in power dynamics expressed through counselling committee was official and acknowledged, the results about perceiving power hierarchy between organizations were of two kinds.

The answers to questions regarding superiority or inferiority were various. Three respondents ($n = 10$) answered negatively to a question about perceiving I-level inferior to II-level by saying, "I do not know, I do not think somehow *inferior*. I see it as linear, firstly it is necessary to finish the first piece, and then the second piece", another replied, "Definitely not. No, no, I absolutely do not perceive it", and one responded, "I do not perceive it" (three II-level employees).

Then the question was turned around and asked as, "To what extent you perceive II-level superior to I-level?". An interviewee said, "If it is a yes or no question, I will say no, but I will add that someone might feel differently. I do not feel like that" (I-level employee). A respondent suggested that all three academic years after the demerger have been different, "This year, not anymore. During the first year I felt [II-level being superior] very strongly" (I-level employee). One participant replied, "Actually I do not know about this top to bottom attitude. Does asking for advice necessarily have to be looking up?" (I-level employee). Many respondents mentioned looking up to II-level employees as a sign of superiority. One employee did not see I-level looking up to II-level as an issue and commented, "But they can and should do that, I do not see a problem with that. It is just, to

look up or aside on time”, and then clarified laughingly, “Well, yes, [II-level] is superior by making the decisions, which I-level cannot make... With regard to the child. It arises from the position, yes. Well, I do not want it to be as hierarchy. It should be a bit horizontal. As in “Okay, we [on the I-level] have these resources, we have tried this and that, let us look outwards”. It should not be seen as looking up, but looking aside, or broader. Well, I do not know, the direction is not important, from above or aside, but as in “What else can we do, who can we involve?” It is totally okay and normal” (II-level employee).

Some respondents mentioned the organizational position as a factor for the superior-inferior situation as well, “Hmm... I think that I do not perceive it from people, but just from organizational position, maybe. We are a national institution, not a local government institution. But I do not perceive it from people, being superior... Somehow from attitude” (II-level employee). Another respondent also suggested that the hierarchy could be related to the organization, not employees, “I do not feel that [II-level is superior and I-level inferior]. Well, maybe it comes from the structure, I-level is in the heart of the crisis so to say, and II-level has just the role as counselling committee, the decision-making role” (II-level employee). One person said, “Well, I cannot say that the hierarchy [between organizations] is not already written into the system due to different regulations” (II-level employee).

Some participants referred to the differences of work content and not power differences, “I do not perceive it. I do not know, if they [II-level] perceive it, but I do not. In my opinion, both I-level and II-level specialists are equal, they just do different work” (I-level employee). Another respondent agreed with the previous one, “I perceive that we have different job tasks, and honestly I hope that II-level specialists have better knowledge

and preparation to some extent. I think that in many cases it is like that” (I-level employee).

Regarding the perceived humanness mentioned in the proposition, the interview included questions about humanness phrased in various ways to comprehend respondents’ perception, e.g. “Does you see others somewhat less human?”, “Do you perceive others as not human?”, “To what extent do you feel you dehumanize others?”, “How do you see others as less human?” etc. The findings reveal that all participants ($n = 10$) answered negatively to the questions regarding perceived humanness. One replied jokingly, “I will say no, they all have one nose and two legs” (I-level employee). Another respondent discussed about the background of the question, bringing out the strict system II-level has, “I see them as humans, but not as they want to be, but rather how the system has forced them [to be] (I-level employee).

Similar questions mentioned in previous section were asked about how respondents perceived about other’s perception of themselves – metaperception, e.g. “Does others see you somewhat less human?”, “How do they see you as less human?” etc. These results are similar to the ones demonstrated in previous segment – all respondents answered negatively to the questions by suggesting that they do not perceive dehumanization from others. After asking if others (II-level employees) could see the respondent as not human, the humorous answer was, “Well, who forbids it? But I have not perceived it though” (I-level employee). Another example of one answer to similar question, “Well... Maybe they can. It is not that I say yes or I say no. Let us say, not less human, but less important or significant” (I-level employee).

The results presented here show that employees do not perceive others as less human, nor do they feel that others perceive them as less human, which applies to employees of both organizations. Therefore, the findings do not support third proposition.

New Theoretical Perspective

Grounded theory focuses on the generation of an original theoretical perspective stemming from “data in which that theory is grounded” (Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987, p. 22). After analyzing the data a new theoretical angle emerged. Since the research question nor none of the three propositions were supported by the data, I interviewed the participants about the possible reasons. Many of the respondents mentioned previous cooperation and connection between people as one of the causes. For example, “We are cooperative partners” (I-level employee), and another, “We spend time together” (I-level employee). One participant answered, “If the crowd is all the same, then I cannot imagine that this kind of [dehumanization] occurs” (II-level employee).

Research has proved the opposite to the new findings presented in prior section by suggesting that social connection actually increases dehumanization. Waytz & Epley (2011) studied the link between dehumanization and social connection. They found that connecting with people brings persons closer to each other but detaches them from humans whom they are disconnected. In other words, people feeling socially connected are more likely to dehumanize socially distant others because their social needs are satisfied and they are not motivated to connect with distant others. These results and the findings from current thesis raise a question – if the social connection between close others is strong enough it will disable dehumanization? As participants mentioned, they had worked together previously before the demerger, and even after it employees of both organizations cooperate and spend time together. The results from interviews suggest that the social connection between I-level and II-level employees is close and, according to the findings, strong enough to disable dehumanization. The strength of the connection is somewhat vague and not specified here since none of the interviewees could describe the relationship between employees in a measurable manner.

The suggestion that social connection between close others disables the occurrence of dehumanization is somewhat axiomatic and trivial. It might seem that the relationship between persons who are socially connected cannot be dehumanizing. However, under certain circumstances the phenomenon is likely to arise. As mentioned in the introduction, demerger, and the shift in power dynamics could have enabled dehumanization, but against all odds, it did not occur. The setting was suitable for dehumanization, but nevertheless, the participants did not perceive it. Hence it is important to investigate the new proposed theoretical angle further under similar circumstances, during drastic organizational changes, and/or in situations in which power dynamics have resulted in an extensive hierarchical gap between people. Also, future research could seek for an opportunity to find operationalize the closeness and strength of the social connection in order to create a valid and reliable measure.

Discussion

The results show no support for suggested propositions, meaning the participants did not perceive others as less human, they did not dehumanize each other. Even though the organizational changes set the stage with uncertainty and power dynamics were shifted drastically after the demerger giving a perfect opportunity to introduce dehumanization between I-level and II-level employees, regardless the phenomenon did not occur. The main reason why the participants did not dehumanize each other could be related to the strong social connection between them. The interviewees suggested that previous cooperation and positive relationship between the employees keeps the connection humane. These results revealed a new aspect: if the social connection between persons is strong enough it could disable dehumanization. In this case the social connection and cooperation between the participants was strong and positive enough to keep dehumanization for occurring.

Current thesis holds a theoretical contribution to previous research. The results suggest that dehumanization can be seen as a diverse phenomenon with multiple factors that affect its occurrence. The link between social connection and dehumanization has been studied to some extent but current study has revealed a new perspective – the strength of social connection impacts the occurrence of dehumanization by enabling or disabling the phenomenon. Still, further research is required to investigate the strength of the relationship more thoroughly.

The practical implication of the thesis can be applied to II-level educational counselling centers in Estonia. The results of the study reveal that strong social connection between employees is beneficial for the people but for the companies in general as well, therefore the two organizations will be encouraged to continue the close cooperation between I- and II-level. Also, the shortcomings and possible improvements mentioned by

the participants will be presented to both organizations in order to advance the cooperation. Participants mentioned that II-level center can be perceived as machine-like but not the employees, which allows future research to study centers in other regions in Estonia.

Besides the contributions and implications, the research faced some limitations too. Firstly, data collection was retrospective. The demerger occurred in 2014 September and data were collected in 2016 (quantitative data) and 2017 from January to March (qualitative data). Some participants also referred to this limitation by mentioning that they cannot remember or it was too long ago, “Trying to remember...” (II-level employee). The next restriction concerns the qualitative research method – it is time consuming. Data collection takes time but also data analysis itself requires resources. Final limitation is regarding the generalizability. Since the sample was small ($n = 10$), it did not represent the target population and the findings cannot be generalized. Of course, the situation in which the research was conducted was unique in the country, no other region went through a similar process. This gives an opportunity for future research to study another II-level center in Estonia which did not undergo demerger and compare the results.

Conclusion

The quote presented in the introduction refers to constant changes and change itself being the only constant. Several changes occurred with the studied organizations but inversely to the quote some things remained quite the same. One of those was the relationship between I-level and II-level employees, which based on a strong connection. The results reveal that strong social connection could disable dehumanization even under suitable circumstances for its occurrence. These findings acknowledge the diversity and unpredictability of dehumanization and also describe the unexpected development of the current thesis.

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